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["GLADYS," WHISPERED JACK, "HAVE YOU NO ANSWER FOR ME, DEAR ONE?"]

A MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

MRS. BRANDON'S mind was at rest at last. She had managed to let her rooms to a permanent lodger, an easy-going individual, who made no attempt to induce her to lower her terms, and, in fact, gave her no trouble whatever, but rather seemed intensely grateful to her for taking him in at an hour's notice.

Mrs. Brandon lived at No. 19, Armadale Grove, Bayswater. The house was one of a small row of convenient villa residences which skirted one side of the Grove, and commanded a wide but dreary view of the great stretch of waste ground lying opposite.

A quiet, respectable neighbourhood this particular locality was considered. The little houses were let at moderate rents, the city could be easily reached by underground or omnibus; and though far enough away from the princely mansions of Hyde Park and Belgravia, the inhabitants of Armadale Grove were the happy possessors of a park of their own—or, at least, they looked upon it as their own—where their children might ramble over the soft green grass, and where the hard-working father of the family could lounge on his Saturday afternoon, enjoying his pipe and his paper.

The tenant of No. 19 in the Grove was a sweet-faced little widow, a brave-hearted energetic woman, who eked out a very infinitesimal income by letting rooms to single gentlemen.

Not so very long ago she had led a very different life, living within the charmed circle of Belgravia, the mistress of a splendid establishment, surrounded by an immense crowd of influential and flattering friends.

But reverses came, and those who had been only too eager to gain an entrée to her house grew cold and distant, and even seemed to forget that they had ever known her.

Her husband, who, as a financier, had amassed a princely fortune, met with heavy losses, and hastened his own ruin by a mad plunge into promising but dangerous speculations.

In an incredibly short time his great wealth was swallowed up in the gulf of rash ventures, and Brandon, the millionaire, was bankrupt. His pride shattered, his heart broken, he sank under his misfortunes and died, leaving his sorrow-stricken young widow to support herself and her little daughter Fay as best she might.

Seeing the necessity for instant action, the forlorn little woman hid her grief away and resolutely braced up her energies for the struggle which lay before her.

Intensely proud, she firmly declined the grudging offers of help from her rich relations, and setting up her household gods at No. 19, Armadale Grove, she adorned her front sitting-room window with a card bearing the familiar announcement "Apartments."

Bravely she struggled on, sometimes very short of money, yet always cheery and hopeful, always on the look-out for lucky chances,

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always turning a bright face to meet the troubles and worries of life.

There had been days when she and her small daughter had feasted meagrely on tea and bread and butter, days when the scantily filled purse had been almost empty, when meat was a luxury beyond the little woman's means; but the plain fare was eaten with a laugh and a merry word, and as soon as the purse grew heavier, the memory of the enforced short commons faded into a pleasant joke which would be met in the same sunny manner when next it presented itself.

Many a time did the shoe pinch, and the rich relations—covertly keeping watch over the struggling household in Armadale Grove—would shake their heads dismally and wonder how long their rash kinswoman would hold aloof from them, and predict that soon, very soon they would be called upon to help her.

But in all her struggles with Dame Fortune the proud little woman never stooped to ask for help, but held on her way with a brave heart and a smiling face, and just when the prospect seemed darkest, and the purse was almost empty, the sun suddenly shone out upon her and banished the secret fears that had begun to assail her.

A month before my tale begins she had let her modest rooms to a young artist, a kindly-faced, splendidly built fellow, with earnest brown eyes, a funny, blunt-looking nose, and a very resolute mouth shaded by a drooping, dark moustache.

He had taken the rooms on the spot, uttering none of the hundred and one objections that Mrs. Brandon was so accustomed to hear from the lips of prospective lodgers.

He liked the rooms immensely, he said, in his grave, courteous way. They were airy and light, and the sitting-room would make him an excellent studio.

He insisted on paying a month's rent in advance, and, departing as quietly as he had come, appeared again in an hour's time with his luggage and painting materials, and taking possession of the rooms without the slightest fuss, commenced to paint as though his life depended on his efforts.

As the days slipped by, the extremely grave expression vanished from his handsome face, and was replaced by a very sunny smile. He began to whistle at his work, and made many gracious advances to Mrs. Brandon's dignified little daughter, sweet, golden haired Fay.

The child was usually very shy with strangers, repelling every effort to make friends with her, rushing away like a startled fawn if anyone spoke to her. But she took mightily to Mr. Grey, the young artist, and forgetting her shyness, trotted in every morning to pay him a visit, hugging a much enduring kitten in her chubby arms, gazing with rapturous delight at the artist's work, and amusing him immensely with her quaint, lisping remarks, and funny, old-fashioned ways.

"My couthin's come," she announced solemnly one morning, marching into Mr. Grey's room, and laying a tiny, fat hand on the young man's knee, "and she's beautifuller than a fairy, or a—a angel!"

"Is she?" said he, abstractedly, for he was staring intently at the empty canvas on his easel, and cudgelling his brains for a subject.

"You ain't listening one bit, Jack," remarked Fay, severely; she had long ago discarded his more dignified name.

The young man coloured and started as he met the severe gaze of the baby-blue eyes.

"Well, I wasn't, Fay darling," he confessed, lifting child and kitten on to his knee, and holding them tightly in his great, strong arms; "I'm a stupid old dreamer. What were you telling me?"

"I thaid," retorted Fay, severely, and emphasizing her words by several vigorous thumps on his chest, "that my couthin had come. She's goin' to stay wiv us; and, oh, Jack! she's such a lovely young lady!"

Mr. Grey frowned and shook his dark head.

"I don't like young ladies, Fay," he said, slowly, and with a loving stroke of the sunny head nestling against him; "but I love sweet little girls."

Fay sat straight up and looked more severe than ever.

"That's not nice—it's rude," she said, with quite an air of decision. "I like her—she's just lov-a-ly; and she's goin' to help my muvver a lot, and—and she's pwomised to make me some jolly toffee!"

Jack laughed and stroked the golden curls again.

"Is her name as pretty as yours, darling child?" he asked, meekly, anxious to propitiate his offended friend.

"No-o, not quite—I don't fink so," admitted Fay, reluctantly, unwilling to disparage the new-comer even in this small matter, and yet, little coquette that she was, delighted by his flattering question. "Gladyth's pwetty," she went on, pensively, "but Brown ain't; and—and that's her name. Any way," loyally, "she's very jolly. And oh, Jack! what d'you fink? To-morrow she's goin' to make the Kismas pudding, and I'm goin' to help her!"

"By Jove! you don't say so!" cried Jack, deferentially. "But, I say, Fay child! isn't it rather early days to be thinking of Christmas puddings? Won't it taste rather nasty if it's made a month before the time?"

Back went the golden head on his shoulder, and the child's laugh rang out merrily.

"Oh, you thilly old goose!" she cried, waving the struggling, squeaking kitten at him. "Pwum puddings keeps for ages!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Grey, dubiously, then he kissed the sweet, scornful lips, and lifting her off his knee, began to collect his multitudinous paint-brushes and place them in their accustomed receptacle.

"Ain't you goin' to work?" asked the child, fixing her serious blue eyes upon him.

"Not to-day, fairy. I wonder if you would like to come out with me?" he went on, insinuatingly. "It's no use me trying to paint; I haven't a subject for my picture yet, perhaps a jaunt will brighten my wits."

"Yeth, I would like," said Fay, promptly, answering the first part of his remark as she danced blithely about the room, dangling the kitten by its forepaws. Suddenly she paused and glanced at him anxiously. "On the top of the 'bus, eh?" she inquired carelessly, yet with a coaxing accent in her clear, childish voice.

"Ah, rather! it's not too cold if you wrap up well.

"And Belinda may come?" with a still more anxious glance.

"I should think so! what would the drive be without Belinda?" exclaimed Grey, with admirable gravity. "She shall go down and have one of her favourite cream cakes at the Charing-cross café."

"Ah, Jack! you are quite too nice to Belinda," cried the quaint little maiden with a soft ecstatic laugh as she whirled herself out of the room to prepare for the promised drive.

For a moment Grey stood before his easel gazing frowningly at the canvas.

"So there's a girl in the house!" he growled out at last, running his fingers restlessly through his short dark curls. "What a nuisance! I shall be meeting her on the stairs, and tumbling over her in the hall. Ugh! I detest girls, with their gushing ways and their abominable conceit. And I came here to avoid the species. By Jove! it's too bad!"

With a stamp of his foot he turned away and caught up his hat and stick, and, marching over to the window, tried to concentrate his thoughts on his picture while he waited for his little companion.

Half-an-hour later the young artist, with Fay and Belinda—a disreputable waxen lady, clad in a gay blue dress—left the house, and hurried down the grove to catch an omnibus at the corner.

"Your lodger is extremely good looking, auntie," remarked Fay's "lov-a-ly lady," who had watched the departure from the safe shelter of a protecting curtain. "He's a picture himself."

"Yes, isn't he a fine fellow?" cried Mrs. Brandon, eagerly, laying down her work and looking up at the sweet arch face opposite to her; then with fond, impetuous flattery, "almost as good-looking as my Gladys."

"Ah, flatterer!" cried the girl, gaily, yet with a sweet gratified blush. "You spoil me," she laughed, holding up a reproving finger. "I fear you will make me conceited!"

"Not I!" retorted Mrs. Brandon, hastily, throwing down her work and crossing over to the girl's side to place her hands on the slender shoulders, and stooping, leave a tender kiss on the smiling lips. "You look in your glass each morning, I suppose—if you don't you are not half a woman—so you don't want me to tell you that those shadowy violet eyes, that little straight nose, that saucy mouth, and artistic bronze brown hair, would utterly prevent anyone calling you an ugly girl."

Gladys laughed merrily, and the colour deepened in her fair face.

"That compliment was very French and very graceful, madam!" she cried, gaily, snatching up a pinafore of Fay's, and stitching away at it in a delightfully busy fashion. "I am curious, auntie," she said, presently, in very demure tones. "I may be—er—well, passable-looking, but I still inherit mother Eve's failing. I positively thirst for information. Tell me, you dear little creature, who is this young man?"

Mrs. Brandon cast a look at her niece—a speculative troubled look—then a tiny smile curled her lips, and she gave the eager looking girl a very quiet, brief answer.

"He is a mystery, my dear."

"A mystery!" echoed Gladys, breaking off her cotton with a jerk and flashing a surprised glance at her serene-looking little aunt. "How d'you mean?"

Mrs. Brandon did not answer at once. She took her hands away from the girl's shoulders, and sinking into a low chair by the cheery fire, stared dreamily into the dancing flames, utterly ignoring her impatient niece.

But Gladys, eager for an answer, jerked her chair sharply on the floor; and, as she had calculated, the rasping sound brought back Mrs. Brandon's wandering thoughts.

"Poor child!" she said, briskly, and with a mischievous glance at Gladys. "I had forgotten you for the moment."

"You are a dear, foolish dreamer!" exclaimed the girl with pretty petulance. "You tell me Mr. Grey is a mystery and then say no more. Now, certainly that scanty announcement is not sufficient."

"No, indeed!" laughed her aunt. "I meant to continue. I should have said that I am almost sure he has run away from home."

"Oh, Auntie! just what I have done!" cried Gladys, dropping her work in her lap, and turning a very interested face to Mrs. Brandon, who nodded kindly at the pretty girl.

"I don't think Mr. Grey is a bit accustomed to the life he is leading now," she said, thoughtfully, "though I fancy he is enjoying the change. He had been here quite a fortnight before he wrote to anyone, then, one evening, when I had been thinking how grave and depressed he was looking, he sent a letter to the post, and two days later received an answer. I took it in to him, and I couldn't help noticing that the address was in a woman's handwriting.

"From his wife, perhaps!" cried Gladys, quickly.

"No, as he took it I heard him murmur, 'From mother.' Since then he has had many letters addressed in the same hand—and, after reading them, he always seems brighter, more contented, more eager to devote himself to his work."

"I wonder why he has left his home?" said Gladys, in musing tones. "Oh, auntie; perhaps, like me, he has been worried and

persecuted, and has run away just to teach his people a salutary lesson."

"Perhaps so," said Mrs. Brandon, thoughtfully, then a minute later, bursting into a merry little laugh, "or perhaps we are quite wrong in our surmises, and there is no mystery after all."

"Oh, don't say that, auntie dear!" exclaimed Gladys with a faint frown and a smile, as she energetically folded up her work and dived after her reel of cotton, which had rolled under the table. "I would rather think that your handsome artist could a tale unfold.' I positively revel in a mystery!"

"So do I!" chimed in her aunt, wickedly, "when the mystery takes my rooms and pays me regularly."

"Why, you mercenary creature!" exclaimed Gladys with fine scorn, and, flying at her little aunt, bestowed an energetic shake upon her, following it up with a shower of kisses on Mrs. Brandon's laughing lips.

CHAPTER II.

Jack Grey stood before his spotless canvas, gazing at it with despairing eyes. He had put it aside the day before, hoping that with another morning he might have thought out a subject for his picture, and be ready to set to work. But alas! no inspiration had come, and now, as late as eleven o'clock, his paints and brushes were still idle, and he on the verge of despair.

"Jack!" said a soft, baby voice just behind him, "come, and I'll show you something nice and pwetty."

The young man, startled out of his musing fit, turned quickly, and smiled in a genial way at blue-eyed Fay, who made a pretty picture herself in her short, navy blue serge frock and snowy pinafore, the marmyriest kitten as usual clasped in her chubby arms, while Belinda was heartlessly trailed by a string behind her callous owner.

For a moment Jack felt vexed at the interruption, but the innocent, confiding baby eyes disarmed him. Down went the useless palette and brushes, and he gave himself up to idleness. He couldn't work, he might as well obey his baby autocrat, and let her lead him wheresoever she would. So, stooping, he took the fat little hand in his, and awaited her orders. They came fast enough.

"Take your shoes off," she commanded. Meekly, yet with a broad smile, he did so. "Now creep," she ordered, in an excited whisper, and, to his great amusement, he found himself sneaking along the passage to the kitchen.

He hesitated a moment as they reached the door, and ventured on a faint remonstrance.

"I don't think I ought to have come, baby," he muttered, mildly; but Fay scorned to notice this cowardly remark.

"Peep frough the cwack!" she whispered, with a severe glance at him.

There was a large crack in the kitchen door, and it was easy enough to see in. He obeyed his tyrant and peeped, and growing at once deeply interested, took a very exhaustive survey of the pretty picture presented to his view.

And this is what he saw. Gladys Brown standing at the table preparing the Christmas pudding, and looking bewitchingly beautiful in her exquisitely-fitting gown of blue serge and her great white cooking apron.

"Auntie," she was saying, as he peeped through the traitorous crack, "does Mr. Grey stay here for Christmas?"

"I think so, dear," responded Mrs. Brandon from her seat by the fire. "He doesn't talk of going away."

"Oh, then he'll taste this lovely pudding! But perhaps, auntie," clasping her little sticky hands in a tragic manner, "perhaps he hates plum pudding!"

A gratified thrill ran through the unscrupulous eavesdropper. How nice of her to think of him! He found himself fighting with a wild desire to rush in and declare that he doted on plum pudding.

"Ain't she beautiful?" demanded the baby beside him.

"Beautiful, Fay," he whispered, energetically, "why, she's a dream of loveliness! Ah!" he cried, suddenly, and with such a start that Fay grew a little frightened, "I have my picture, child—the very thing!"

He stepped back, eager to return to his room and make a hasty sketch—stepped back right on the luckless kitten, who snarled and spat and altogether made a horrible row.

"Oh, my poor pussy!" wailed out Fay, adding to the confusion and betraying the unhappy young man in the most heartless fashion.

In a minute the kitchen door was flung wide, and aunt and niece appeared upon the scene. Mrs. Brandon flew over to her distressed baby girl, Gladys picked up the terrified kitten and stood thoughtfully stroking its soft coat, while she listened in the demurest fashion to Jack Grey's awkward apology.

"So Fay beguiled you!" she cried at last, in amused tones. "Well, I forgive you freely; one cannot resist that baby's coaxing." Then with a charmingly coquettish air and a glance down at her big apron. "Do I make a good cook, Mr. Grey?"

"You made a delightful picture," replied the young man, gravely, an intensely admiring expression in his dark eyes, "at least you suggested one to me, Miss Brown."

"How do you mean?" asked the girl, flushing a little as he uttered her name.

"I want to paint a picture of you as you stood mixing that pudding," replied Jack, boldly, "and I'll put in Fay sitting on the table watching you."

Gladys flushed softly and hesitated; but Mrs. Brandon broke in, eagerly,—

"Oh, yes, do consent, Gladys," she cried, adding naively, "I should so like to see Fay in a picture."

"Well, I don't mind," said the girl, slowly, her colour deepening prettily under the steady scrutiny of the lodger's dark brown eyes.

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed the young man, rapturously. "When may I begin, Miss Brown?"

"To-morrow morning, I think," she answered, quietly, and with a strange little smile.

He went away then back to his neglected work; and Gladys, following her aunt into the kitchen again, slipped her arm round the little widow's neck and looked steadily at her.

"Madam," she said, with extreme gravity, though there was a merry light in the velvety eyes, "what would Mr. Dane say to this arrangement?"

Mrs. Brandon laughed at the solemn query, and patted the girl's soft cheek very tenderly.

"Bother Mr. Dane!" she cried, energetically. "I don't think much of his ideas as to what is proper. I am your aunt, child—your dear father's only sister; I think I have a greater right to care for you than your grim guardian."

"And so do I, dearest auntie!" exclaimed Gladys, enthusiastically. "And that is just why I found you out and took refuge with you when—when they worried me so."

This energetic speech brought the ready tears into the little widow's eyes, but a very sweet and gratified smile soon chased them away.

"Dear child!" she murmured fondly, and with a proud glance at the fair, flushed face; then, a little irrelevantly, "I—I hate all worldly-minded calculations!"

"And I too," laughed Gladys, going back to her interrupted pudding-making.

* * * * *

From that eventful morning, Jack Grey's studio seemed to its owner to have been transformed from a rather dingy sitting-room into a kind of earthly paradise.

Day by day he grew happier, more contented with his surroundings; life to him at present seemed one long, glorious dream, from which he had no wish to awaken.

His picture progressed steadily but slowly. Many were the sittings needed; and Jack, gazing his fill at the fair, sweet face of the pudding-maker, grew strangely reluctant to let it out of his sight.

The girl herself found a wonderful pleasure in those visits to the quiet studio. Mrs. Brandon or Fay always accompanied her; and feeling safe in their presence, Gladys was ever bright and self-possessed, talking cleverly to the infatuated young man, and stealing away his heart's best love with her arch, bright ways.

One day, a little before Christmas, Gladys stood at her aunt's sitting room window, gazing out somewhat wistfully at the frozen pathways. A sharp frost had set in, and people were hurrying past, with skates dangling from their wrists, on their way to the Round Pond or the Serpentine. Gladys, herself an enthusiastic skater, was secretly longing to join the hurrying stream; she would have given something to be gliding along the smooth, glistening ice, feeling the healthy blood tingling in her veins, the sharp, crisp air roughly kissing her glowing face.

But she said nothing of all this, knowing that Mrs. Brandon, who was in the grip of a severe cold, would feel intensely sorry did she guess that Gladys was yearning for this, her favourite winter amusement.

Nevertheless, though the girl flattered herself that her aunt knew nothing of her desire, shrewd little Mrs. Brandon had read aright the furtive, wistful glances, and was honestly regretting that her tiresome cold made an enforced prisoner of her, preventing her from escorting her niece to the gardens to indulge in her favourite pastime.

"What a nuisance this cold is!" she cried suddenly, in hoarse and laboured accents. "I should dearly have liked to take you to the Round Pond, Gladys, and have watched you skating."

The girl started and flushed brilliantly, wondering remorsefully if she had been looking very disappointed.

"You sweet little auntie!" she cried softly, quitting the window and coming over to poke the fire vigorously, "you are always thinking of me. Don't worry yourself about the skating, I shall have many another opportunity; and this afternoon I mean to read aloud to you until you fall asleep, keep a glorious fire up, and make you an especially strong cup of afternoon tea."

Mrs. Brandon smiled gratefully.

"You are a good child," she said, with a sort of ridiculous croak; "but, all the same, I wish I could have got some one to take you to the ice. Baby could look after me."

"Madam, I will have no vain regrets!" exclaimed Gladys, in comically tragic tones. "I have made up— why?" breaking off in surprise as someone knocked at the door, "is that Susan already with the tea?"

"No, it's me, Miss Gladys," answered a deep, rich voice, and, the door opening, Jack Grey came slowly in, with Fay perched on his shoulder.

"Muvver! Jack's got you some lov-a-ly grapes!" cried the little one, nodding at them from her high perch, "and I'm goin' to sit 'side you and feed you wiv 'em; and—and Jack wants to take Gladys to skate!"

Mr. Grey glanced nervously at Miss Brown as Fay told her tale, and his heart sank within him, for the purple eyes were very grave, and the sweet rose flush had faded, leaving the girl strangely, wonderfully pale.

"Am I too absurd, Miss Gladys?" he asked in subdued tones, lifting the child gently down. "I knew you skated—Fay has told me so—and I knew Mrs. Brandon could not take you. I think I am to be trusted to protect you," this with a fleeting, kindly smile, "and so I ventured to come and ask Mrs. Brandon if she would let me take you to the Gardens for an hour's skating."

The little widow looked up nervously,

wondering what Gladys would say, and felt a great and perfect happiness take possession of her unworldly heart as, after a faint pause, the girl answered in a very sweet, straightforward fashion,—

"I will come with pleasure, Mr. Grey. Auntie! you don't mind?"

"No," said her aunt with a long, straight look at the artist's frank, handsome face, and smiling serenely as her eyes met his. "I appoint Mr. Grey, my deputy, and I think that the sooner you are off the better."

With a bright smile the girl flew away to dress, Fay trotting after her to superintend her toilet, and for a short while the little widow and her lodger were alone.

He was the first to speak. Following her as she crossed to the window, and laying a gentle hand on her arm,—

"Mrs. Brandon," he said, in low, hurried tones. "I think you guess the hope I cherish in my heart?"

"Yes," she answered, briefly, yet with an encouraging smile.

"And you still allow me to take care of her?" he queried, breathlessly.

"Yes," she said again, very gently. "I know that some would call me romantic and foolish, but—but I cannot help that; I think only of her happiness. There, she is ready!" as light steps were heard in the hall; "take good care of my darling, Mr. Grey."

"I will," he muttered, pressing her hand. "She is my darling too."

A minute later the two young people were walking down the narrow street, looking very happy and contented, and Mrs. Brandon stood at the window watching them, a happy light in her laughing eyes.

"What a match for our young heiress!" she murmured, turning away at last to the fire. "How angry Mr. Dane would be if he could only know that the darling child had given all the love of her heart to a struggling artist! He will speak to her soon, I know, and my innocent darling will give him the answer he craves. And then what a scene there will be with the angry guardian, and how the foolish little widow will be reproached! Ah well, I shall have my reward in the knowledge of their great happiness."

* * * * *

Gladys felt very light-hearted and content as she and her companion walked at a brisk pace towards the point where they might hope to catch an omnibus.

"We could walk it," remarked Grey, quietly, as they stood at the corner, waiting, "but that would only tire you and spoil your pleasure, Miss Brown."

Gladys, glancing up at her tall companion, bestowed a very grateful, little smile on him, and wondered secretly why she should feel so glad to be taken care of by this resolute-looking, beaming young man. She could not answer that mental query, she found, even though she pondered over it all the way in the rattling omnibus, and was even still considering it as she sat beside the great sheet of ice gazing down at Grey as he fastened on her skates.

"I want you to wait here a minute or two while I skate round the pond," he said, presently breaking in upon her meditations. "I must see if it is safe before you venture on."

"Nonsense!" cried Gladys, hastily, holding out her hand to be helped up. "If it is safe for you it is safe for me."

"I don't think so," he said, coolly. "Now, be a good girl and wait for me, I shall not be away two minutes."

He glanced at her in a laughing imperious way, then, ere she could speak, glided off, leaving her with crimson face and beating heart.

"So! he would be master, and have me obey him!" the girl murmured rebelliously. "What a glance he favoured me with! And he thinks I will stay here meekly until he returns; but I won't though, I shall follow him at once."

With a little disdainful toss of her pretty head, she struggled up from her chair, and, after a moment's hesitation, started off towards the centre of the sheet of water.

"I shall overtake him this way," she thought, "he went the round. I wonder what he will say when his eyes fall upon me."

With a naughty feeling of satisfaction she flew along—in her exultation never noticing the ominous cracks that were stretching now in all directions—only when, all at once, a long warning cry fell on her ear, she looked up in a startled way to find that every one was skating towards the edge of the pond, and she alone occupied the centre of the ice.

Pale as death, she started onwards again, her terrified eyes fixed on a tall figure coming rapidly towards her, a very agony filling her heart as she realised the danger that threatened both her and the young artist.

"And it is all my fault!" she gasped out. Then, as suddenly the ice gave way beneath her, she stretched out her hands to wave him off, and shrieked out an agonised entreaty to him to go back.

A moment later she was plunged in the icy water, a wild horrible surging filled her ears, she felt herself sinking swiftly down, darkness enveloped her, and she knew no more.

When next Gladys opened her eyes she found herself in one of the tumbledown London cabs, her head resting against some one's shoulder, her hand held in a very firm clasp.

"Oh!" she gasped out faintly, wondering languidly why she felt so wretched and cold, "I—I wasn't drowned then?"

"No, you wilful young woman," cried a glad, reproachful voice—Grey's voice—"I caught you just as you sank and got you to the bank. You came round then a bit, only you were in a very dazed condition, and a doctor, who helped me with you, advised me to bring you straight home and put you to bed."

A faint flush crept into the girl's white cheeks at his tender authoritative words. She made a weak effort to sit up, but Grey held her very firmly.

"You'll faint again if you move," he said, quietly. "Miss Gladys, you were very naughty," he continued, gravely, as she sank back helplessly.

"Yes, I know it," she said, meekly; and not meeting his brown eyes.

"I shan't scold you now," he went on, gently, "because here we are at number nineteen, and you must be off to bed, and have some hot toddy; but to-morrow, ah! then I shall be severe. No, you are not going to walk, I mean to carry you."

"Indeed, no!" she cried, indignantly, and tried to look very angry as he took her in his arms and carried her into the little hall, up the stairs, and into the tiny bedroom, which, in answer to his hasty question, the astonished servant pointed out as Miss Brown's.

"Gladys! Mr. Grey! What is the matter? What has happened?" cried Mrs. Brandon, suddenly appearing, a terrified expression in her pleasant eyes.

"Miss Brown has had a ducking," said Grey, promptly, "and she's in for a terrific cold if you don't get her out of her wet things at once. I'm off to comfort Fay, and calm her bewildered mind. I know Susan will have frightened the child."

"Oh, thank you," cried the mother, gratefully, and shut the door upon him, turning her attention at once to her shivering niece, and ringing the bell sharply for Susan.

A sharp rap at the door caught her attention, and she hurried to it, wondering why Susan should wait for admittance, starting back hastily as she came face to face with her eager-eyed lodger.

"One minute," cried Grey, deprecatingly, "don't forget some hot whisky when you've got her into bed, Mrs. Brandon."

A little impatient exclamation from Miss Brown herself sent him off again, and brought the widow to the bedside, a smile on her anxious face.

"How intensely prosaic—hot whisky!" she said, with a little amused laugh.

"It is good of him to think of me, auntie," cried Gladys, reproachfully, "especially when I have been so horrid to him!"

"Have you?" glancing at her keenly; then seeing how upset were her nerves, and, besides hearing Susan's heavy step as she brought up some hot coal, Mrs. Brandon nodded wisely and quieted the girl's trembling lips with a gentle kiss.

"To-morrow you shall tell me," she said, softly. "All you have to do now is to jump into bed and go to sleep."

CHAPTER III.

After all, Miss Brown was none the worse for her impromptu bath. She indignantly refused to remain in bed, only yielding so far as to allow her anxious aunt to bring her breakfast up to her room.

But she rose immediately afterwards, and came downstairs only a little later than her usual hour, lightly putting aside Mrs. Brandon's eager suggestion that she should wait until afternoon, by which time the little parlour would be thoroughly warmed.

Jack Grey, meeting her on the way down (he had been lingering about for some time on purpose to catch her), decided at once that she was none the worse for her immersion. She was a little pale perhaps, and certainly looked subdued; but the sweet eyes had lost none of their dancing light, and the pretty head was held very erect.

"Thank you, Mr. Grey, I am quite well," she said, softly, in answer to his eager inquiries, flushing a little as he grasped her slender fingers. "Auntie wanted to keep me upstairs, but I rebelled."

"As you did yesterday," remarked Grey, reproachfully, "and your rebellion gained you a cold bath."

"I know," she said, hurriedly, a wonderfully meek accent in her voice. "I behaved ridiculously, and—and if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Grey, I——"

"Hush! don't let us think of it any more. I know what you would say," interposed Grey, hastily, seeing that the violet eyes were full of tears, and that her lip was trembling pitifully. "Let me take you down now. You may think you are quite well, but your nerves are uncommonly shaky yet."

"Nerves!" echoed Gladys, scornfully, her penitent mood vanishing. "I don't possess any. Auntie says I am ridiculously strong-minded."

"Does she?" retorted Grey, drily, and with a little provoking laugh, at the same time drawing her hand on to his arm. "Well, I can't say that I agree with her."

"But you know so little of me, Mr. Grey," exclaimed the girl, petulantly. "Oh," as he led her towards his studio, "I—I will go to auntie now, please."

"No you won't," coolly. "The parlour chimney is in a state of revolt, the room full of smoke, so we—that is, Mrs. Brandon and I—think it best that you should come into my room for a while. There's a jolly fire, my big lounging chair is drawn close up to it, and Fay is waiting for you with the kitten and Belinda."

The girl laughed faintly, but she still looked doubtful until, meeting his steady gaze, she suddenly yielded, and let him lead her into his bright, cheerful room.

It was indeed a picture of comfort, the girl thought, as she sank into the luxurious chair and looked languidly around.

In the shining grate a glorious fire danced and sparkled and roared, its jolly red glow lighting up Fay's golden curls as she sat on the hearthrug dressing Belinda. On a little table close to Gladys stood a great bowl of white and yellow chrysanthemums, and beside it one or two of the newest periodicals.

"Are you not going to paint this morning

Mr. Grey?" asked Gladys, nervously, seeing that the easel had been relegated to a distant corner, and the canvas upon it carefully covered over.

"Not this morning," said Grey, quietly, standing on the rug with his hands in his pockets, looking down happily at the girl's pale, charming face. "I don't feel in the mood for work."

"Then give me some music!" exclaimed Gladys, strangely restless and confused under the quiet scrutiny of those searching, brown eyes.

A cottage piano stood across one corner of the room, and Grey, who was passionately fond of music, was wont to spend all his leisure time at it. He played exquisitely, and often since their first meeting had Gladys sat listening with dreamy pleasure to the light and perfect touch of his clever fingers.

"Play for you?" cried Grey, irresolutely, reluctant to leave the vantage ground of the hearthrug. "Well, I will if you like."

"I do like," she said, softly, and smiled demurely as he strode away to the piano and ran his fingers lightly up and down the keys.

Presently, after a few idle chords, he glided into one of Mendelssohn's dreamiest melodies, playing it with exquisite taste and feeling; and the girl, listening eagerly to the soft and soothing music, closed her tired eyes and, leaning back in that seductive lounge, revelled in the wondrous harmony.

Fay, utterly absorbed in Belinda's toilet, was unusually silent, only the crackling of the cheerful fire could be heard in the quiet room when, now and again, Grey paused for a moment ere he glided into another melody. Glancing at the girl after a while, he smiled in an amused fashion, and held up a warning finger to the pensive baby.

Gladys was fast asleep, her white hands folded in her lap, her pretty head resting comfortably against the cushions behind her, her long, curling lashes lying softly on her sweet, pale cheeks, the breath coming regularly and gently between the curved red lips.

"She's asleep," whispered Fay, excitedly, dropping Belinda and creeping over to the piano. "Shall I pinch her and wake her up?"

"No, no, baby!" muttered Grey, lifting her on to his knee. "Stay here with me and I'll tell you a lovely story."

Fay smiled delightedly, and leaned her golden head against him, fixing her great blue eyes on the young man's kind face. By and by the door opened gently, and Mrs. Brandon peeped in, and disappeared as quietly when her quick eyes had mastered the situation.

Peacefully Gladys slept on, lying there in the glow of the friendly fire; and Grey, in a long, low murmur, ran through three or four of Fay's favourite fairy tales, refreshing himself now and then with a lingering, tender glance at the pretty slumbering girl in his great arm-chair.

She looked so peaceful, so beautiful, he thought with a rapturous thrill of happiness. He longed to take her in his strong arms and tell her there and then of the love that filled his heart for her. But alas! she was fast asleep, and Fay was sitting on his knee eagerly asking for "more stories."

Once again the door was pushed open, and Mrs. Brandon looked in with a funny, half-frightened, half-delighted expression on her pleasant face.

"Your mother is here, Mr. Grey," she said, gently, and stood aside to make way for a white-haired, timid-looking old lady, who hurried past her and threw her arms excitedly round the artist, the astonished Fay being inextricably mixed up in the energetic embrace.

"Oh, Jack, my dear boy, I am so glad to be here!" cried the mother, tremulously. "I couldn't have existed much longer without seeing you. I—I have been thanking Mrs. Brandon for all her kindness to you. I can never be sufficiently grateful to her."

Grey stooped and kissed the agitated, old face, flushing hotly as, in so doing, his eyes fell on the unconscious Miss Brown.

"I am glad to see you, mother!" he said, heartily. "Does—does my father know you are here?"

A cloud swept over his mother's joyous face. She shook her head sadly.

"No, dear lad," she said, gently. "I had to come up on a shopping expedition, and so seized the opportunity."

Jack's handsome face grew very grave as he listened, and the resolute lips under the dark moustache took a firmer line.

"Still obstinate," he cried, recklessly. "Mother, I don't intend to yield."

"I know you do not, Jack," returned his mother, gravely, "and I quite agree with—— Oh, Jack! Mrs. Brandon! what a pretty picture! Who is she?"

She had been glancing in an interested manner round the pleasant room, and the beautiful dark eyes so like Jack's had at last fallen upon the pretty sleeping girl in the great lounge.

"She's Gladys!" announced Fay, proudly, peeping from behind her mother, to whom she had flown as soon as she had extricated herself from that first fervent embrace. "She's my couthin—Gladys Brown. Ain't she lov-a-ly?"

"Gladys Brown!" echoes Jack's mother, in bewildered tones. "She—she is indeed lovely!"

"Yes, is she not?" cried Mrs. Brandon, eagerly. "She ran away from home because they worried her," she went on, moved by a sudden impulse. "She knew I would sympathise with her, and be glad to have her."

"Oh!" ejaculated the old lady, quietly, though her eyes were twinkling in the most astonishing fashion.

"Mr. Grey saw her and asked if he might put her in a picture," continued the little widow, hastily, "and—and I consented."

"I am very grateful to Miss Brown for allowing me to introduce her into my picture," broke in Jack, eagerly, puzzled by the expression on his mother's face.

"And I am grateful to Mr. Grey," cried Mrs. Brandon, in tremulous tones. "Yesterday he saved the child's life at—at the risk of his own;" and then, unheeding Grey's remonstrance, she told the tale of Miss Brown's rescue.

"Jack, I'm proud of you!" exclaimed his mother, gladly. "Oh! see, she is awake!"

Turning with a start they saw that the great violet eyes were wide-open and fixed in an amazed fashion on the white-haired visitor.

"Auntie," cried the girl, faintly, "I—I have been asleep, I think!"

"Indeed, you have," said Grey, hastening over to her and bending his head to speak to her. "It was my sleepy playing beguiled you, and while you slept a visitor arrived—my mother."

"Your mother," stammered Gladys, springing up and gazing at the old lady in a sweet, confused way, "and I was sleeping here! Oh, how stupid!"

Jack raised his head and looked imploringly at his mother, who, understanding the glance, came swiftly up to them and, stooping, softly kissed the fair, blushing face.

"I am glad Jack saved you," was all she said, but those few words were very expressive.

"Thank you," said the girl, simply, and with a lingering look at the fine old face. "I am glad Mr. Grey has you with him for a while," she went on, softly. "He must feel very lonely."

"Must he?" queried the old lady, mischievously. "Do you think so?"

But Gladys refused to answer, and ran off after her aunt and Fay, who had departed to see about some luncheon for this unexpected visitor.

Mrs. Grey stood a moment, gazing thoughtfully at the door through which Gladys had disappeared, then her eyes met Jack's, and she broke into a little laugh, seating herself at the same time in the chair her son had placed for her.

"Mother, I am glad to see you!" cried the young man, kneeling down beside her and laying his great hand on hers. "Your letters have been splendid, but they were not you."

Mrs. Grey smiled in a pleased way, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

"I have missed you dreadfully, Jack," she said, with a little sigh; "the house has been like a—a desert."

"How has my father been?" asked Jack, slowly. "Has he quieted down at all?"

"A little; still," reluctantly, "he is very much annoyed with you. Dear boy, he thinks you might gratify his one desire."

The young man laughed savagely.

"So he's still worrying about that tiresome girl," he cried, recklessly, "the everlasting heiress, mother! I know exactly what that girl is like. Self-assertive and plain, most probably bright red hair, and certainly an awful squint! I won't marry her, mother! I detest ugly girls! Ah, madam, now what are you laughing at?" he demanded, abruptly, as a broad smile illuminated Mrs. Grey's pleasant face.

"At your impetuous speech, sir," cried his mother, in amused tones. "You have never seen Miss Pauncefort?"

"No, nor ever want to," broke in Jack, hastily. "But you have seen her, mother mine, and can tell me the truth. Is the girl nice-looking?"

For a minute Mrs. Grey hesitated, thus confirming Jack's suspicions.

"She is not plain," she said at last, avoiding his eyes.

Jack laughed lightly.

"Oh, you dear, charitable woman!" he exclaimed. "You might as well have told me she was plain. Never mind, dearest, I don't care if she is plain or beautiful, I could never marry her."

"Why not, Jack?" ventured his mother, timidly. "You say you don't believe in love, and you have admitted to your father that you must marry some time. Why not please your father, and let us introduce you to Miss Pauncefort?"

Jack looked up quickly, a regretful expression in his eyes.

"Why, mother, are you going over to the enemy?" he cried, in vexed tones. "I thought I could depend on you."

"So you can, my dear boy," came the hasty, loving answer. "You know I hate the idea of an arranged marriage, and I should not speak to you of your father's wish if I did not know of your resolve to marry some time, though you 'could never fall in love.'"

She looked steadily at her handsome son as she spoke, and smiled again as she noted the wave of red that, at her words, swept over his face.

"I—I think my ideas have changed a little lately, mother," he said, with a sudden effort, getting up from the hearthrug and strolling away to his easel.

Mrs. Grey leaned back in her chair, and watched him curiously.

"How do you mean, Jack?" she said, softly.

"I—I thought I scorned love and—and sentiment. I never dreamed that I should ever be proud to do homage to a beautiful face," he said, in low yet steady tones, as he lifted the cover off his cherished picture, and gazed fondly at Miss Brown's exquisite face. "Since I left home, dear," he went on after a minute's silence, "I've been taking lessons in—in romance. I've learned that I have a heart, mother mine."

"Jack!" exclaimed Mrs. Grey, in fond, exulting tones, leaving her chair and coming over to him, "who has been your teacher, dear lad?"

As she asked the question, she slipped her hand on his arm, and, leaning forward, looked

long and earnestly at Jack's skilful reproduction of Mrs. Brandon's bright little kitchen.

Grey flushed hotly as she put the question to him. Then, without a word, he raised his hand and pointed to where in the picture stood Gladys Brown in her dark gown and great white apron, her little hands resting on the edge of the big pudding basin, her lovely eyes fixed on the tiny, smiling, golden-haired maiden perched up on the table beside her.

Grey's thoughts were engrossed with the charming picture, and so he missed the glad smile that lit up his mother's face as she, too, looked at that arch, dainty face.

"You love her, Jack?" she said, tremulously, her hand tightening its grasp on his arm.

"Yes, mother, I do, with all my heart!" came the quick, fervent answer. "I was a fool to think I could not love!"

"And she, does she know this?" went on his mother, gravely.

"Not yet. I have not told her what is in my heart; but I think she must guess. Oh, yes, surely," he cried, in low, passionate tones, a dreamy, happy light in his dark eyes, "I shall tell her soon," he continued, hurriedly. "I—I can't wait much longer. Will you not give me your good wishes, mother?"

He turned and looked at her wistfully, and she, deeply touched, drew his head down and kissed him fondly.

"Oh! my dear boy, yes, indeed I will!" she cried, eagerly. "But your father? What will he think? We—we know nothing of Miss Brown. She has evidently quarrelled with her own people."

"As I have," interposed Jack, in fond, imperious tones. "Mother, I feel sure she has been tormented in the same way! There is some hateful cad with plenty of money who wants to marry her. Her people urge on the match, and she, hating the thought of such a mercenary scheme, avoids their persecution by leaving her home, and taking refuge with her unworldly-minded little aunt. Oh, yes, I am sure that is her story."

"And you mean to steal her away from the hateful cad, eh?" exclaimed Mrs. Grey, with an irrepressible burst of infectious laughter, in which, after a moment's silence her son was fain to join.

"That's just my idea," he retorted, coolly, when their mirth had a little died away.

"Poor cad!" cried his mother in such comical tones, that Jack had to laugh again. "I wonder," pensively, "if Miss Brown detests him as you do your red-haired heiress?"

"I know she does!" said Jack, emphatically; "when we've settled matters I shall ask her what he is like. I feel positive that he is extremely plain and vulgar, but tremendously wealthy."

"I wonder if you will find you have guessed aright?" said Mrs. Grey, thoughtfully, stooping and picking up Fay's sleepy kitten.

"I think so," answered her son, complacently. Hallo!" as Susan came in with a daintily-arranged tray, "lunch already! By Jove! how the time has flown!"

"Jack! what shall you do about your father?" demanded his mother abruptly, a little later on, when lunch was a thing of the past, and she and Jack were sitting by the fire talking eagerly. She did not lift her eyes as she asked the question, she was busy drawing on her gloves, and her whole attention seemed engaged by them.

Jack shrugged his shoulders and stared gloomily into the fire.

"If Gladys makes me a happy man, I shall run down and tell him, though, of course, he won't rejoice with me. He'll only storm and rage at this ending to my mutiny. If he refuses me, why, it don't matter, and I shall wait until he sends to ask me to come home again."

"But, Jack, my dear boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Grey, hastily. "If—if you marry your love, and—and your father refuses to receive her, how do you intend to live?"

Jack laughed softly.

"We shall manage, mater," he said, bravely. "I have already sold a few of my artistic efforts, by-and-by I think I may make a good income out of my painting."

"But Gladys?" said Mrs. Grey, hesitatingly. "Do you think she would care to share your struggles?"

The young man laughed lightly as he jumped up to look for his hat and coat.

"Doesn't her face answer that doubt, mother?" he said, gently. "I shall ask her to-morrow, and you shall soon know my darling's worth."

"I think I know it already," said his mother, gently as he had given his answer, a minute later laughing and exclaiming, as, catching her little speech, Jack rushed up to her and kissed her gratefully.

"Have mercy upon me, oh, most ardent lover!" she said, breathlessly. "I must go now, dear boy, I shall miss my train if I stay on here."

"And that would never do!" exclaimed Jack, hastily. "My father would only be annoyed. Come! we can get a hansom at the corner."

"But Mrs. Brandon?" objected his mother. "I must see her, and—and Gladys."

Jack's face glowed as she uttered that last name.

"Of course!" he said, eagerly. "See here, mother! I'll run for the hansom, and you shall slip into Mrs. Brandon's parlour and say good-bye."

Taking her hand, he drew her into the little hall, and pushing her gently into the opposite sitting-room, dashed off out of the house.

"I have come to say good-bye, and to thank you once again, Mrs. Brandon," said Mrs. Grey simply, as the little widow came forward to meet her, and Gladys started up from her low chair by the fire. "I—I shall come again soon, but I wanted to tell you how happy I feel in leaving Jack in your care."

"That is good of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Brandon, with a delighted smile, which deepened as she caught the significant glance which the old lady turned on her lovely blushing niece. "I shall do my best to take care of Mr. Grey," she added, quietly, her bright eyes fixed lovingly on the blushing girl, as Mrs. Grey, with a sudden movement drew Gladys close to her, and kissed her sweet red lips in a very tender, loving fashion. "I am glad Jack was the one to save your life, child," said the old lady, softly.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Grey," whispered Gladys, tremulously, returning Mrs. Grey's kisses with shy warmth, and wondering dreamily why she felt so ridiculously happy.

"That's as it should be," said Jack's mother with fond pride. "My boy never failed anyone in the hour of need. But, child, you can easily reward him."

"Ah! how?" queried the girl, eagerly, a rich crimson glow sweeping across her face as she met Mrs. Grey's smiling eyes.

"Ah, you must guess the way," cried the old lady, archly. "Jack is calling for me. I must go;" and kissing the girl once again, she hurried from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

It was but an hour's journey from Liverpool-street to Maviscourt, the little country town, on the outskirts of which stood the old Hall—Sir John Lorimer's residence—a beautiful grey stone mansion, surrounded by lovely gardens and verdant park land and woods.

Sir John was very proud of his beautiful old house, and was fond of repeating the names of the long list of Lorimers who had reigned peacefully and prosperously over the grand old place for quite three centuries, son succeeding father with admirable regularity, and carrying on the old name in the most satisfactory manner.

But lately a change had taken place in the pleasant monotony of the family history: the heir to the title and estates had, as Sir John savagely remarked, "kicked over the traces" and refused to follow the meritorious example set him by his predecessors—in other words, to take unto himself a wife and settle down as "Benedick, the married man."

"I don't want to marry, father," he had said, coolly, to Sir John, when the fiery-tempered old man one evening revealed to him his ideas on the subject, and imperiously ordered him off to London in pursuit of a young and charming heiress. "I never did like girls, and I have quite made up my mind to devote myself to painting for the next few years. Really, dad, a wife would bore me terribly, so do please give up the idea of me marrying."

"But—but the name, you young idiot—the name!" spluttered Sir John, purple with rage, "is that to die out?"

"No, why should it?" retorted Jack, carelessly. "Philip Lorimer, who comes after me, has already two sturdy little sons."

"Pshaw!" snapped out Sir John, frowning fiercely at his incorrigible son, "hasn't the name been carried on in the direct line for centuries? How dare you suggest the spoiling of such a record?"

"I shall not marry your beautiful heiress," he had answered, firmly; and then there had followed a royal row ending in the banishment of the young heir from his ancestral home, and bringing gloom and unhappiness to the grand old Hall.

Gentle little Lady Lorimer grieved terribly for her idolised son; but though she pleaded from her heart to Sir John that he should pardon the young man and recall him at once, her tearful entreaties availed nothing; only her husband sternly forbade her to mention his son's name, and refused to read the letters that after a time arrived so regularly.

One very cold afternoon in winter Sir John Lorimer was stamping up and down the narrow platform at Maviscourt Station, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his great riding cloak, his face glowing with the cold.

There was a troubled expression in his twinkling eyes, and a faint frown wrinkled his crimson forehead as at length he paused at the end of the platform, and gazed into the darkness beyond.

"I know she'll have seen the lad," he muttered presently, with an angry little laugh. "I could tell from the expression of her face that she meant to find him out. I'd give something to hear how he's looking, the young rebel! And yet I can't—it wouldn't be dignified. The worst of it is that the dear old lady will be afraid to mention his name to me; I've been so horribly fierce with her whenever she has ventured to speak of the lad."

"Train'll be in in another minute, Sir John," observed the jolly-looking old station-master, breaking in upon his meditations; "she's signalled now."

"Ah, that's good news, Mason," returned Sir John, genially, banishing his tiresome thoughts, and turning to walk up the platform with the smiling official. "On a night like this a little country station doesn't present itself in a very attractive aspect."

"No, sir," agreed Mason, with a huge shiver; "and the 'cases is none the better for standin'. Ah, here she comes!"

A minute later, Sir John was helping out of a first-class compartment the pleasant-looking, white-haired lady who had lunched that day with the young artist at 19, Armadale-grove, Bayswater.

The old man shouldered her numerous wraps and parcels, and giving her his arm, hurried her along the station and out into the quiet road, where was drawn up a beautifully appointed little brougham.

"We won't delay a minute, dear," cried Sir John, fussily, leading her over to the carriage and pulling open the door for her "this bitter wind is rather trying for the

horses. Are you all right?" piling her parcels on the opposite seat and jumping in after her.

"Quite, John, let us be off at once; don't keep them standing any longer. I almost wish you had ordered Todd's cab to come for me."

Sir John turned and literally beamed at his diplomatic little wife—such consideration for his precious horses quite touched him, as the astute Lady Lorimer had reckoned it would.

"Drive on, Sykes," he called out of the window, and then, pulling it sharply up, he twisted round and looked searchingly at his gentle wife. "Of course she's been to see him," he mentally decided; "why, she's bubbling over with delight."

He was right. There was a very happy light in his wife's eyes, a pleased smile hovered round her sweet old mouth, and now and then, as she talked to the observant baronet, she laughed right out in a joyous, merry way. Yet all her conversation was of her shopping expedition. She told every trivial incident that had occurred in her visit from shop to shop, but, as Sir John had ruefully decided, she never spoke of her visit to the truant, never once mentioned his name.

"And I won't ask her," thought the baronet, savagely. "She knows that, and has made up her mind not to give me a helping hand. Well, I don't wonder. I ought not to be surprised that she's afraid to mention his name to me. By Jove! I wish I could trick her into speaking of him; I think I'll have a try when dinner is over. Eh? What did you say, my dear?" starting out of his reverie, as Lady Lorimer suddenly broke the silence that had fallen upon them.

"I was saying how beautiful the dear old hall looks when it is all ablaze with light," answered his wife, softly, leaning forward as the carriage swept round a curve and drew up in front of the grand old house, whose every window was lit up, while a welcoming blaze streamed down the steps from the wide open door. "Every time I return to it I think I love it more."

"So do I, so do I, Nan!" exclaimed Sir John, in husky tones, jumping out and giving her his hand; "and yet there is one Lorimer who despises his fair heritage, and is content to keep away from it."

Touched by the suspicious tremor in the baronet's deep voice, his wife looked up quickly, a few hasty words trembling on her lips.

"I think you are wrong, John," she said, gravely, though her eyes were smiling. "He—he loves his home, too."

"Pshaw!" cried Sir John, angrily. "Let him prove his love then!"

He waited for no answer, but strode away to his dressing-room, for they were late, and the dinner bell would ring before long.

"Dear old spitfire!" murmured Lady Lorimer, her eyes following her lord and master as he marched upstairs. "If he only knew! But no," with a decided nod of her white head, "I shall not tell him yet. He deserves to be kept in suspense for a little while longer. He guesses I have seen Jack; I could tell that from the way he was staring at me in the carriage, and he's quick enough to know I have heard some good news; I have such a tell-tale face; but his pride won't allow him to question me, and so he shall wait until dinner is over before he hears my delightful news."

She laughed softly as she hurried away to her dressing-room, and rang for her maid. Her mind was full of bright and pleasant thoughts, and she looked so serenely content and happy that Simmonds, the maid, remembering the melancholy expression she had seen so often on her mistress's face since the young master's departure, decided that her lady had heard some wonderful good news—perhaps that Mr. Lorimer was coming back to the old hall, and would marry the young heiress after all.

Lady Lorimer went down to dinner with that contented smile still resting on her gentle face, and grew more radiant as time after time she met Sir John's wistful glance, and silently refused to understand and answer the mute entreaty that she read there.

"I had a letter from Dane by the noon-day post, Nan," remarked Sir John, abruptly, when they were settled in the warm, luxurious drawing-room.

Lady Lorimer looked up in an absent-minded way from the list of her purchases, which she had apparently been absorbed in, and spoke in dreamy tones.

"Have you, dear?" she said, carelessly. "Now what did I buy at Dickins and Jones? I can't for the life of me remember."

"Just like you women, you are so inaccurate," growled out Sir John, seizing the steel poker, and making vicious digs at a blazing piece of coal. "Dane tells me that Miss Pauncefort is behaving quite as unreasonably as—as our idiotic son. She refuses to think of matrimony at all."

"Oh, John, is that so?" cried the artful old lady, raising her eyes eagerly from her account book. "Then you cannot blame dear Jack for his obstinacy. You will forgive him, surely, now."

"I shall do nothing of the sort, madam," snapped out the baronet, all the more crossly because he knew his words were unjust and harsh. "I still blame Jack, and consider that it is entirely his fault that the match has not come off!"

"How do you mean, John?" asked his wife, quietly, her smiling eyes fixed on his angry face.

"Surely you can guess my meaning," cried Sir John, in sarcastic accents. "If Jack had tried to please me, and consented to be introduced to the girl, very likely she'd have lost her heart to him. He's got a taking way with him when he chooses, and he isn't exactly ugly."

"No," said Lady Lorimer, slowly, and with a little merry laugh, "he isn't, and as you say, he can be very charming when he chooses. Why, he has only been in his present rooms a few weeks, and already he has won for himself the faithful love of a girl's sweet young heart."

The baronet dropped the poker with a tremendous clatter, and, leaning forward, looked curiously into his wife's beaming eyes.

"What do you mean, Nan?" he stammered, growing crimson.

"I mean that Jack is deeply in love with his landlady's niece, and—and, I think she likes him," answered she, calmly. "I went to see Jack to-day, and made the delightful discovery before I had been five minutes in his room."

"I thought I forbade you to visit him?" cried Sir John, hotly, and grew suddenly ashamed of himself as he met her reproachful eyes.

"But I did not promise to obey you, John," she said, bravely, her steadfast gaze never wavering. "I felt I must see my boy."

"How's he looking?" queried Sir John in jerky tones.

"Well and happy," came the prompt answer; "he is busy with his painting, and, as I told you, he is in love."

"But that's utter nonsense!" exclaimed Sir John, furiously. "His landlady's niece! Oh, it's utterly absurd!"

"No it's not," coolly. "If our boy wins her you will be very happy, John, or, at any rate, you ought to be, considering that your greatest wish will be gratified!"

"Nan!" staring at her apprehensively, as though he thought she were mad; "are you crazy? You know that my great desire is that the lad should marry Miss Pauncefort?"

"Well," serenely, "that is just what he is going to do!"

Sir John rose from his chair, and striding across the bear-hug, laid his huge hand on his little wife's shoulder.

"You're talking in riddles, my good woman," he said, impatiently. "You tell me one minute that Jack is in love with his landlady's niece, and the next instant you declare that the lad is going to do what I wish, marry Miss Pauncefort."

"I am not talking in riddles, my good man," retorted his wife in happy, laughing accents, seizing his great, brown fingers, and pulling him down beside her on her low couch. "Oh, my dear, stupid old John! Can't you solve the enigma? Can't you guess what I mean?"

"No!" as he shook his head in a puzzled way.

"Then I suppose I must tell you. To-day dear," patting his hand, impressively, "I was introduced to the beautiful girl who has won Jack's heart. The little landlady, a charming woman by the bye, called her niece Gladys Brown. Jack knows her only by that name; but I recognised her at once from a photograph I have seen of Jack's heiress. I knew that she had assumed another name—that she is really Gladys Pauncefort, the girl from whom Jack ran away."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Sir John, his eyes sparkling; "but she surely recognised his name?"

"No, indeed, for the very simple reason that Jack has dropped the name of Lorimer and assumed that of Grey. He bade me address his letters, 'Mr. Grey,' and ask for him under that name when I came to see him. Thus his landlady and her niece only know him as John Grey, the struggling young artist."

"And he has fallen in love with the heiress, Nan?" exclaimed Sir John, eagerly; "you are sure of it?"

"I should think I was," she retorted with a happy smile, "and I don't wonder—she is the most charming girl I have ever seen."

"Ha, ha!" roared out her husband, immensely tickled by the turn affairs had taken, "and those young rebels imagine that they are defying us all and marrying for love's sake only!"

"And so they are, John," said his wife severely; "they are actuated by no mercenary considerations. Jack thinks his darling is poor and forlorn; she is revelling in the idea of marrying a handsome struggling artist."

"They're a couple of unsuspecting babies!" chuckled Sir John; then in proud accents, "Certainly they are not mercenary, they leave that to their elders. Nan, has he asked her yet?"

"No, John. He told me he means to learn his fate to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Then I'll tell you what I'll do. Just run up by an early train and get Dane to go with me to Armadale Grove. I'd like to surprise them—the young babies. Then I'll bring 'em all back with me."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed his gentle little wife, her sweet eyes full of happy tears. "My dear, dear Jack, how happy he will be!"

"I hope so," said Sir John, gravely, flushing as he thought of his own harsh words to his brave, handsome lad. "He—he deserves to be."

And then, with a suspicious little cough, he bustled away to consult the time tables afterwards, feeling too restless to settle down to his reading, trotting out to the stables to arrange about the dog-cart being brought round early in the morning.

* * * * *

At a late hour that same evening the young artist gently pushed open the door of Mrs. Brandon's little sitting-room and looked in in a very deprecating manner. His energetic landlady was busily occupied in renovating one of Fay's pretty frocks, and was stitching away at a great rate; but she caught the sound of the opening door, and glancing quickly up, welcomed the intruder with a very sunshiny smile.

"Come in, Mr. Grey," she said, briskly, dropping her work for a minute. "Do you want something? Can I do anything for you?"

Jack Grey laughed shyly and looked most

embarrassed, but he accepted the invite, stepping over to the hearthrug and looking down at the little lady in a hesitating fashion.

"I—I brought you the *Graphic*," he stammered out at last, "and—and—er—will you sew me a button on this glove?"

"I'll have it on in a minute," said Mrs. Brandon, readily, taking the glove from him and glancing round for the cotton. "Won't you sit down while I do it, Mr. Grey?" she went on, with a swift laughing glance at him. "I won't keep you long."

"Oh, please don't hurry," muttered Jack, disposing of his length of limb on the cosy little chair that Gladys was so fond of. "I—I don't mind waiting."

Mrs. Brandon smiled again as she bent over her task.

"You see I am all alone," she said, quietly. "I sent Gladys off to bed early. I thought it wisest after yesterday's adventure."

"Yes, yes, of course," he replied, hastily. "It is well to take precautions."

There was a short silence after that, which he broke somewhat abruptly.

"I am glad Miss Brown has gone to bed," he said, gravely. "I—I wanted to speak to you about her."

A little flush crept into the widow's pale cheeks, but she spoke very quietly.

"I am listening, Mr. Grey," she said, gently, her frank eyes fixed on his handsome, excited face.

"I think you must know what I want to say, Mrs Brandon?" he cried, with a brave effort to speak in a calm, dispassionate manner. "I—I love your niece dearly, and—and to-morrow I mean to ask her to be my wife. I have no wealth to offer her, my income is a terribly precarious one, depending entirely on the number of pictures I am able to sell. I—I have felt often that it is wrong of me to ask Gladys to share my poverty. I have felt that if I did the right thing I should look out for rooms somewhere else, knowing that if I stayed on here I must speak to her; and yet I find it impossible to go, to tear myself away from all that is brightest and best in my present life. I must tell her my love, must offer to her all I have—the devotion of a faithful heart."

"And that is all Glady wants, I am sure!" cried the unworldly little widow, her kind eyes glistening with tears as she held out her hand to the anxious-looking young man. "She cares nothing for riches."

"I knew it," he answered, in tones of deep conviction, grasping her proffered hand, "and that knowledge determined me to speak out to my darling. I want you to help me, Mrs. Brandon, to manage that I may have a chance to tell her of my great wish some time to-morrow. I think the child guesses my intention, and in her sweet shyness tries her best to avoid me."

"Yes, that is so," said his little landlady, thoughtfully. "She'll do her best to keep out of your way, Mr. Grey."

She laughed merrily as she spoke and nodded delightedly at the beaming artist.

"But you will help me, Mrs. Brandon?" he cried in pleading tones.

"Of course I will! Trust in me and don't worry yourself. Is to-morrow the limit of your patience?" demurely.

"Yes, my kind friend," retorted Jack, with a sudden reddening of his bronzed face.

"Then you shall have your chance," said she, decisively, tossing his glove to him and shutting up her work-basket.

With a few warm words of thanks the young man jumped up and moved to the door, looking back eagerly as Mrs. Brandon suddenly pronounced his name in somewhat nervous accents.

"I—I wanted to know," she said, gently, meeting his eager eyes, "if you told your mother of—of Gladys?"

"Yes," with a glad laugh, "and found that already she had guessed the state of affairs."

"And was pleased?" anxiously.

"Yes, indeed!" triumphantly. "She has fallen in love with my darling, and would be delighted to welcome her as a daughter. I am to let her know at once if I win Gladys for my own."

"Ah, I am glad of that!" cried Mrs. Brandon, softly, a wonderfully serene expression on her pleasant face. "That was my only fear, that that dear old lady might not approve."

"I know she would," returned Jack, confidently. Good-night, my best friend."

"Good night, Jack," said she, uttering his name with pretty hesitation. "Pleasant dreams."

With a happy laugh the young man vanished; and Mrs. Brandon, after a few minutes' delightful reverie, turned out the gas and stole upstairs, pausing for an instant at the door of her niece's room, then pushing it open and entering noiselessly.

The girl was fast asleep; her softly-flushed cheek resting on one little hand, her beautiful bronze brown hair straying in rich masses over the white pillow.

"Darling child!" murmured the little widow, fixing her loving eyes on the exquisite peaceful face. "How happy she will be! I suppose I ought to let them know—to tell them of the foolish match she is about to make. No," with a little defiant nod of the head, "I shall do nothing of the sort; I will not be the one to spoil her happiness."

She stooped then and very softly kissed the girl, and after a moment's study of the sweet face, left the room as quietly as she had entered it.

CHAPTER V.

"You want me to-day, Mr. Grey? I—I thought the picture was almost finished."

"So it is—nearly, but there are a few last touches to add, and—and I must have my model for them."

Gladys flushed hotly, and glanced irresolutely towards Mrs. Brandon's little sitting-room, then cast a nervous and yet at the same time defiant look at the tall, resolute-faced young man, who had hurried after her as she ran towards the kitchen when breakfast was over, and, with a word of entreaty, laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Can't you manage without me?" she said, hastily. "I am very busy this morning; I—I have promised to make Fay some almond toffee, and—and I have letters to write."

The hand resting on her arm was suddenly removed, and with a cold "I am sorry I troubled you," Mr. Grey turned and walked slowly back towards his studio.

"Oh, he is angry now! He thinks I am unkind!" murmured the girl in distressed accents, at once repenting and longing to make amends. "How could I refuse him after his goodness to me! What an ungrateful wretch I am!" In an instant she was at his side, and was speaking to him in the sweetest, most penitent fashion. "Mr. Grey," she faltered out, her beautiful eyes downcast, her red lips slightly quivering. "I—I did not mean to be disobliging. I will come to the studio." Then, as he turned with a glad eager exclamation, his face lit up by a very happy smile, she continued, demurely. "Of course you will want Fay too; she is in your picture, remember."

Grey laughed contentedly, and a wicked expression crept into his dark eyes. He knew he could easily get rid of Fay when he was ready for his *tête à tête*, his kind little landlady would see to that.

"Oh, yes! Fay must come," he answered, carelessly. "I'll go and fetch her."

"No, I will," cried the girl, sharply, in her desperation, deciding to make her aunt join them in the studio. "I will bring her to your room, Mr. Grey."

She flew off at once, and the young artist, with an expression of great amusement on his handsome face, walked back to his room, and began to arrange his paints and brushes.

"She suspects me, my timid darling!" he muttered, with a little soft laugh; "my face has played me the traitor's part. How shy she is! and how unutterably sweet!" this last with a huge sigh. She will insist on Mrs. Brandon's coming in with her. Ah, well! the dear little aunt and I understand each other. She will play into my hands. By Jove! it's fortunate for me that Gladys knows nothing of our long talk last night. How anxious the dear old mater will feel to-day until she gets my telegram, and then how my father will storm! Well, he may find another husband for his odious heiress. How my darling will laugh when I tell her of the old man's schemes."

He smiled broadly at this last thought, and the smile still lingered on his lips when Miss Brown appeared, protected by her bright little aunt and the loquacious Fay.

He grew suddenly very grave, though, as he noted the nervous expression in the girl's beautiful eyes; he judged it wisest to banish all signs of his great joy lest the shy bird should flutter away; so, with an admirably serious expression, he settled his little landlady in a comfortable chair, meeting her shrewd glance for one long minute as he did so, and then carefully placed his two pretty models, talking quietly and composedly all the while.

He released Fay after a time. He had finished with her, he said, and the child, tired of sitting still, trotted away in search of the miserable kitten, which was sleeping peacefully by the kitchen fire.

Still, Gladys felt comparatively secure, knowing that Mrs. Brandon's presence would ensure a continuance of the calm sensible conversation which had been carried on ever since they entered the studio.

She glanced across at her aunt as Fay danced out of the room, half afraid that she would rise and follow her small daughter, but lost her nervous fear as she saw that the little lady was knitting as industriously as ever, and apparently absorbed in the latest periodical.

Mrs. Brandon, however, perfectly well aware of Grey's hopes, had arranged that the phlegmatic servant-maid should summon her away to the kitchen at a certain hour; therefore, though apparently deeply engrossed in her book, she was in reality waiting anxiously for the expected summons.

It came at last, just a little while after Fay's departure, and the widow tripped off with a murmured excuse and a fleeting encouraging glance at the beaming owner of the studio.

Gladys looked up nervously as the diplomatic aunt left the room. Her heart was beating madly, and she longed to jump up and beat a precipitate retreat; but pride forbade the cowardly action. Sternly she controlled her timidity, and went on talking in a very self-possessed way to the tall young man at the easel, though her pulses were bounding madly, and she could feel a fierce hot blush suffusing her cheeks.

Grey's heart was thumping madly if she had only known it, and though he went on steadily painting, and answered the girl's remarks in his calmest fashion, he felt that his self-possession would vanish the minute he raised his eyes and met hers.

Presently the conversation languished, and in the end a heavy and embarrassing silence descended upon the young couple—Jack being apparently absorbed in his painting, and Gladys knitting away at a stocking of Fay's as if her life depended upon its completion.

"Are you going home for Christmas, Miss Brown?" asked Jack, with a sudden effort, all at once becoming conscious of that awful, terrible silence.

He raised his eyes from his work as he asked the question, and bent a lingering, caressing glance on his beautiful companion.

"No," she answered, in soft, hurried tones, industriously counting the stitches on one of her needles, "I shall stay here with auntie. Are you returning home, Mr. Grey?" she

continued, carelessly, yet never meeting his glance.

"No." He forced himself to utter the little monosyllable, then dropped his eyes hurriedly lest she should see the rapture shining in their depths.

"Then, after all, you will taste my excellent plum pudding!" she cried with pretty audacity, yet with a strange little tremor in her sweet voice.

"Yes, I shall," he answered, slowly, and in a somewhat absent-minded fashion, his attention seemingly absorbed in a wonderful and awful tint of green which he was mixing on his palette.

His tone was so abstracted, he seemed to be taking so little notice of anything but his work, that Gladys felt intensely relieved, starting violently when he suddenly dropped his palette and sheaf of brushes and strode across the room to her side.

"I am hoping that this Christmas Day will be the happiest I have ever known, Gladys," said Grey, hurriedly, a suspicious tremble in his deep voice.

The girl flashed a startled glance at him, and a funny flutter ran through her heart as she heard him for the first time use her christian name, and felt his strong brown fingers close upon hers.

"If you will answer me one question as I wish, I shall be the happiest fellow in the world!" he went on, holding her trembling hands in a tighter clasp, and gazing eagerly at the beautiful downcast face.

As she listened to his tender, pleading voice, the hot colour swept again across the girl's fair face.

"What is it you would ask me?" she said, almost in a whisper, and never once raising her shy, sweet eyes.

Jack Grey smiled very tenderly as he caught that soft, flattering query.

"I'll tell you," he said, gently, and drawing her a little closer to him. "I want to know if you will be my wife, sweetheart? If you will say yes to the question, I shall indeed be the happiest man in all this wide world!"

For a minute the girl did not speak, an oppressive silence reigned in the room, and Jack—eagerly waiting for her answer—heard as in a dream the shrill singing of the canary that hung in the sunny window, and the falling of the ashes in the grate.

"Gladys!" he whispered at last, in pleading tones, unable any longer to endure the suspense. "Gladys, won't you speak? Have you no answer for me, dear one?"

Infinitely touched by the pathetic accent in the earnest voice, the girl lifted her lovely pansy purple eyes to his frank, handsome face, and, with the colour coming and going in her fair cheeks, gave him the answer he craved.

(*Continued on page 237.*)

PRETTY PENELOPE.

CHAPTER XXV.

Dr Westall's theory that Denis Latimar was ignorant of his wife's decision to attend the ——shire hunt ball was perfectly correct.

Denis, in fact, knew very few of Marcia's decisions while they were in the course of being determined in her mind; they were generally conveyed to him by some third person, or else shot at him in a sort of defiant manner at a moment when an appeal of common sense or any such argument was absolutely futile.

Thus it was with their visit to Lady Susan Verschoyle. In a casual way, a week or so before, when there had been a small dinner party at the Court, comprised of one or two hunting men, who gladly accepted Latimar's hospitality for a run now and then with the Latimar hounds, the subject of the ——shire hunt ball had been introduced, and Marcia had been asked if she intended to honour it with her presence. Denis replied to this query.

"I am afraid not," he had said, gently. "I don't think I can permit my wife to risk so much for the sake of a country ball; the weather is too raw."

Marcia had sat like stone under this tender speech, which in another wife's ears would have sounded so sweetly. She looked handsome in her black velvet dinner-dress and several odds and ends of the Latimar diamonds gleaming about her throat and hair; but all the guests present were quick to note her changed appearance. They were chiefly men who knew her mother and had met her many times before her marriage, when they had admired her most cordially. The thin pale woman with the restless hungry eyes and pinched mouth that spoke a story intelligible to almost every intelligence—a story of discontent, of evil temper and unhappiness—was as unlike the strapping fine figured Marcia Rochdale as it was possible to be. She had refined with her illness and would always have a handsome air, but there was an odd sort of feeling prevalent among those men who stayed most frequently at Latimar Court—a feeling of repugnance to their hostess and an odd yet definate feeling of pity for her husband.

"Latimar's made a hash of it, he's caught a tartar!" was the muttered thought that ran through the mind of Denis's men friends.

Marcia was so consumed with imaginary wrongs, so eaten up with her insane and causeless jealousy, so full of her unworthy suspicions and cunning tricks to try and disdover Denis in some false position or other, that she lived in a state of absolute blindness as to the effect she produced on outside people.

Her ambition had been strangled by her jealousy. Her pride in her position, it is true, asserted itself now and then in some arrogant way; occasionally she had a moment in which the remembrance that she was what she was gave her intense pleasure, and almost turned her out of her foolish and wantonly cruel path; but these moments were rare. Nature was too strong within her, and philosophy was something she did not even comphehend, so her pride, poor as it was, soon shared the fate of her ambition. Denis had long since realised that he must hope for very little from his wife. He had never recovered his first opinion of Marcia; none of her carefully acted manners, just after they were married, had had the least value in his eyes.

The Marcia he had admired and liked, in whom he had been interested and who had touched his sympathy, had perished utterly that night when she had revealed her true character to him and stripped herself of every illusion.

And yet, despite his knowledge of her real worth, despite the disillusionment and the miserable tragedy of their marriage, Denis did not, could not, have understood for a single moment the absolute significance of the woman who was his wife.

They had little in common. He found nothing to touch his admiration, to kindle anew his interest. He had had to suffer moments of the deepest pain and mortification at Marcia's hands and still he had not even commenced to fathom the poverty of her mental condition or to realise the wealth of her mean, poor, spiteful, malicious nature. He had made excuses for her jealous fury all through the past autumn; he had attributed her conduct, which otherwise must have been unintelligible to him, to the condition of her health, and Dr. Westall had to a certain extent fostered him in this, hoping out of sheer affection for the young man that what he said might be true, but not having any faith in the matter himself.

The death of the child had awakened all that was best and tenderest in Denis. He desired by every means in his power to comfort and console his wife in what was to him a great disappointment and sorrow, and therefore must be doubly so to her.

Marcia did not respond to his tender ministrations; in the days when she was recovered from the severity of her illness she lapsed into a kind of sullen silence which was most distressing both to her mother and her husband.

She of course regretted the loss of an heir; but as strength came back to her so came back the one dominant thought that had been with her all the past year—she thought that Denis was false to her and that she was a wronged woman.

How she argued out either of these feelings belonged to the mystery of a distorted mind and unhealthy imagination.

The fact however remained, and day by day Marcia allowed her whole mental system to be submerged by this brooding over a fiction which had no rightful origin and was born entirely of her over whelming vanity and jealousy.

Those were very, very hard days for Denis; sometimes he felt as though he could not go on any longer, as if he must throw down his arms, trample duty, honour, responsibility, moral and legal bonds beneath his feet, and rush wildly forth into the vast spaces of the world, where nature would welcome him as a mother, and spread the healing balm of her beauty upon his aching, tortured heart.

If Marcia had only stretched out a little finger to help him, if she had only realised what was before her, if she had, in short, done anything but what she did do, Denis would have been grateful to her and would have done his best to make their mutual lives, as far as lay in his power, something very different to what it had been.

But Marcia made no sign—gave him no aid—hour by hour the atmosphere of his home became more heavy, more difficult to him. Denis sometimes felt as though he was living in a perpetual fog—a fog that dulled his sight, stopped his breathing, crept into his brain, and shut out for ever the glorious gold of the sun and of day.

This night of the dinner was one of the nights when he felt, with a despair equal to pain, that he must never hope for a glimpse of the sun again—that, so far as peace and good understanding were concerned, he must never look for them with Marcia. He could no longer make her health an excuse for her conduct; he had to realise that the woman he had put in his dead mother's place was utterly unworthy to be his wife or the wife of any honest, straightforward man—a woman who made the hot flush of shame rise swiftly to his cheek by her frequent bursts of jealous anger, as vulgar as they were odious; a woman who filled him with despair and disgust; a woman who, having schemed to obtain her position, was unjust and ungenerous enough to pose as one, too, who had been wronged; a woman lacking in every womanly character, giving forth indeed symptoms of a nature which to even contemplate made Denis shiver.

This was his wife, the woman bound to him for good or ill, the mother of his children, his companion for life!

Still, though he was beginning to know how futile was every hope of a possible future with Marcia, he did not renounce his care of her, and when the question of her going to the ball had been mooted, he had at once, and with true sincerity, spoken his refusal to allow of any such proceeding.

Marcia, crumbling her bread with her thin, hot, nervous fingers, was answering the man beside her in a mechanical fashion, while her ears were drinking in all that Denis was saying at the other end of the table. She had caught a further sentence from one of the guests, a Colonel Humphreys, on the subject of the ball.

"I expect there will be a little disappointment if no Latimar Court detachment turns up," the Colonel had said. "You ought to

show yourself for half an hour, Latimer, if even Mrs. Latimer cannot accompany you!"

"Oh, perhaps I will!" Denis had replied, carelessly, devoting not a second thought to the matter. Balls were never much in his line, and since his association with Marcia, it seemed to him vaguely as though he had grown into a very old man, to whom dancing and all gaiety must be an impossibility. Marcia, however, had caught the answer and stored it in her memory.

So he would go to this ball without her! Her heart beat wildly, and her face flushed hotly; there was something behind it all if he went. He was going to meet someone, to act wrongly, to do—well, Marcia's futile imagination sketched at once a dozen things Denis, poor, unconscious, innocent, unhappy Denis, was going to do.

She said nothing, but she watched and waited. One day it came to her with a lightning flash that Penelope's new home was situated in ——shire. She quickly sought all information about the ball, and in a very short time she had determined that Denis intended to go to it simply and solely because Penelope Desborough would be there, and that his leaving her at home was all part of the game. Her plans were soon made. She wrote off without delay to Lady Susan. She knew that her marked slight to Penelope would hurt her cousin very much, and this gave her a little satisfaction, though not much—it would have to be something very big that would satisfy Marcia's thirst for revenge on Penelope.

Lady Susan's prompt reply set her at work on her preparations. She telegraphed to Paris for a gown, she wrote to her bank for the more splendid of her jewels, the diamonds she had worn on her presentation and during her stay in London, and Denis was in absolute ignorance of these movements until two days before the time appointed for their arrival at Lady Susan's.

It was the advent of the enormous box from Paris that aroused a little curiosity in his mind. He immediately guessed the contents, and he felt a thrill of hope and something like real pleasure illumine his mind. If Marcia were going to develop feminine weaknesses, and indulge in extravagances, he regarded it as a happy sign.

"You have got something tremendous in that big box, Marcia, I feel sure," he said, adopting a light jesting manner, as they sat at lunch in solitary grandeur. "I confess to feeling a most unnatural curiosity."

"It is my gown for the ——shire hunt ball next Wednesday," Marcia answered, in a cold, unsympathetic way, and quite unconcernedly.

Denis looked at her in much surprise.

"The ——shire hunt ball!" he repeated. "But, Marcia, surely you do not intend to go? Why——"

"Having ordered a gown expressly for the occasion, I may say I have every intention of going," was Marcia's reply, with that smothered tone in her voice that was a note of warning to Denis that a storm was close at hand.

He was silent a moment, and then gave a quick, short sigh that was not lost on his wife.

"How I wish, Marcia," he said, with very natural irritation, "how I wish you would be a little like an ordinary individual! I don't understand these strange ways and perpetual secrets and surprises. Why can't we run straight? Why not have told me you wished to go to this ball? I——"

"Oh!" and Marcia laughed shortly, "many thanks; I know what you would have done. I am perfectly aware you have special reasons for not desiring my presence at this ball, Denis."

Denis's face flushed, and he checked the exclamation that rose to his lips.

"There is nothing mysterious in such a desire, Marcia. I do not consider you are sufficiently strong enough for much social duty. I know that if you appear at this ball you will have to dance a good deal, and——"

Marcia glanced across at him.

"I beg you will begin to disabuse your mind of the fact that I am an invalid. I am not an invalid, and I do not intend to gratify your selfishness by posing as such."

Denis lost his temper.

"Good Heavens! Marcia!" he said, hotly, "how horribly cruel and unjust you are. You—you positively appal me sometimes by the wrong thoughts that seem to crowd your brain. I wish——" Denis broke off, and rising, moved to and fro for a moment in silence; suddenly he paused beside her. "Marcia," he said, "have you any memory? Do you ever go to the past? If so, just draw a picture of yourself as you appeared in the days when to be my wife and mistress of my house was the one desire and aim of your life. Were you anything other than what you are, I think you would recognise that so far as has lain in my power I have done my duty to you. You married me knowing I had no real deep love to offer you, but I said then I would try to make you a good husband—and, Heaven knows, I have tried; and what is the result? You credit me with every vileness, every unworthy thought, every miserable wrong a man could do. My girl!" Denis laid his hand on his wife's thin shoulder, "you are making a great mistake; you are spoiling your own life, you are embittering mine. We must have a change, Marcia—a man can stand a great deal, but he can have too much to bear sometimes. If I treat you badly, tell me of my sin, and I will try and correct myself. I can do no more than try to make you happy. I think we might pull together a little better, if you would only meet me half way, but——"

"Are you treating me to a sermon—it is not Sunday!" Marcia said, with a most disagreeable laugh.

Denis drew his hand away swiftly.

"You are a cruel woman, Marcia," he said, his voice choked and miserable.

"And you!" Marcia rose to her feet, and then she checked herself. "After all, we are so silly to quarrel—don't you think so? There is nothing new to be said between us now. Things are certainly not very satisfactory. We have no great cause for rejoicing in our married life, but we have equally no great cause for quarrelling. Let us agree to differ; it will save so much trouble. Now in the case of this ball, you don't want me to go; I want to go. I have made every arrangement to go; I am therefore going. If you do not want to be bored, you can easily remain away."

"If you are determined, I must of course accompany you."

Denis spoke very coldly; he was a little surprised by such a long, quietly uttered speech from Marcia. It was a new departure for her to bear herself in this manner.

Ever eager to grasp at anything which might foreshadow a more rational frame of mind, however, Denis accepted Marcia's cheap cynicism, as he imagined it was offered with a mental reservation that he would never approach his wife again on the subject of their mutual life. It had been an effort to speak at all, it was too bitter and humiliating to find his words dismissed with a sneer and a supercilious smile.

He listened to the arrangements Marcia had made in complete silence.

The news that they were to be guests at Lady Susan Verschoyle's house gave him a cold sensation in his heart. In discussing the ball, he had forgotten for the moment that it was to be held so near to Penelope's new home; now, as with a sharp blow, he realised to the full all that lay before him in the next few days, the misery he would have to combat, the passion of love and yearning he would have to crush down. The thought of Penelope brought all at once a sudden fear, sharp, acute. He glanced at his wife, and she, though her eyes were not looking at him, knew that he did so, and divined his thought.

"It is good of Lady Susan to take us in," he said, as casually as he could speak, "but we might have gone to your cousin's house. Of course you know Penelope Desborough is living quite close to Lady Susan. I expect she will be hurt that we did not ask her hospitality."

Marcia affected a manner of extreme languor and indifference which at once imposed on Denis and set his fear at rest.

"I knew Penelope was living in some eccentric fashion in the country, but I had not an idea where. She never writes to me; I get such news of her as I have through my mother; I think on the whole it is better we should go to Lady Susan."

"As you like," Denis answered, and there the conversation ended. As he walked to the stables, he was conscious of a great relief.

All at once the horror had come to him of what might not happen did Marcia ever gleam a hint of the truth about Penelope.

"Thank Heaven she does not?" he said to himself; "things are bad enough as they are, but with that——"

Denis drew a sharp breath and then all the pent up agony of his heart burst forth.

"Oh! my love! my love! my love!" he said to himself, "just to have sight of you—knowledge of your presence once again—and yet—yet, if this comes—if we stand face to face, as we may do in a few days, shall I be strong enough to bear the test? Can I turn from you and take up the burden of my lost life once more?"

Marcia watched him disappear among the trees.

His tall handsome figure made a picture of strong graceful lines as he walked.

Her heart was beating wildly, throbbing in every vein. "He is afraid of me," she whispered to herself, "he is afraid of what I shall do to her if she comes in my power. I deceived him well, he thinks I do not know; he will leave her to chance, and chance shall give her to me and to my revenge.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Oh! but of course you are not serious, Pen, dear. You must come to the ball. Do you hear what she is saying, Daisy? She does not intend to turn up on Wednesday night. Why, it is absurd!"

"Dear Madge, you are as vigorous and vehement as ever, I find!" Penelope laughed.

She was very glad to see her old girl-friend again. Madge Riley and she had never indulged in one of those hot and strong friendships which occur in the lives of most girls, in fact they had drifted apart considerably when Penelope had been at school; but there had always been sincere liking between them, and good fellowship.

Madge was not pretty, but she was essentially a nice girl, with a good figure, clear complexion, superb teeth, and equally magnificent constitution.

She was of an altogether more robust type than Penelope, could be in the saddle for hours, ride anything, jump anything, dance all night, and ride again all the following day.

Denis had once called her a "jolly girl, a real good sort with a good heart," and this was a very rough but fitting definition of her.

Mrs. Warriner, her married sister, who was to do duty as chaperone, was a replica of Madge, only on a slightly more matronly scale.

The advent of these guests completely metamorphosed Thicket Croft. Penelope was a little dazed by the bustle and chatter for the first hour or so. As Dr. Westall had prophesied, Madge Riley did her best to "make the house jump;" but Penelope soon found considerable pleasure in the innovation.

It was strange to her to find herself laughing so heartily, being danced up and down stairs, and through the halls and corridors, having anecdotes screamed at her from odd

corners, and finding herself in perpetual request.

Life under her uncle's roof had been one long monotonous dream; the return to this boisterous, happy companionship bewildered her, and brought her back suddenly to old times, when Madge and she had made excursions together, climbed trees, played jokes, and otherwise enjoyed themselves.

"It is just angelic of you to take us in, Pen, and such luck your being able to do it," cried Miss Riley, when she had made herself breathless with explorations over Penelope's domain. "I was wondering how on earth I was going to get to this hop, and then all at once I set my brain working, rubbed up my memory, discovered you were absolutely on the very spot, and I lost no time in throwing myself on your mercy!"

"And very glad I am to have you," Penelope said, warmly.

Indeed, she felt wonderfully better for the advent of these two cheery girls, Mrs. Warriner was very little older than her sister. Something in Dr. Westall's manner, allied to the knowledge of Denis's near approach, had made her depressed and unsettled the day or two before her guests arrived.

It was not possible for any one to remain low spirited, however, very long when Madge Riley was to the fore. She carried an atmosphere of laughter and fun about with her, and before long she had infected Penelope with this atmosphere, and awakened the old flow of spirits and mischief.

"I don't know when I have laughed so much," Pen said, as they sat round the fire in her bedroom, and brushed their hair. "Madge, you are too funny; but how cruel you are to that poor little Frank Neville. You know he adores you!"

Miss Riley made a *moué*, and her sister laughed stily.

"Oh! Frank's sun has set long ago, Pen," she said.

Pen was all agog.

"Oh! Madge, who is it? Do tell me, you know I always criticised your flirtations. Is it anyone I know? Do be an angel, and speak out."

Miss Riley, however, averred with considerable emphasis that she had nothing to tell, but Penelope observed that her colour deepened, and her warm sympathy was immediately touched, for she felt at once that it was no mere "flirtation" with Madge this time. Mingling with her sympathy was a quick throb of regret that was almost like envy.

How beautiful it must be to feel that love could stretch before one without barrier of sin or shame, without memories sad as death, and remorse bitter beyond description.

She did not press her friend to reveal anything, she knew Madge would speak by and by. The conversation turned once again on the ball, and Penelope's statement she was not going was greeted with absolute dismay and disappointment.

"My uncle has not been dead three months, you forget that, Madge," she said, gently, when she had listened to much protestation.

"But ——" then Miss Riley paused, she knew Penelope well enough to be sure that if her mind were once determined on any point all the urging in the world would not make her change; moreover, it was impossible to argue down the girl's mourning as an objection. "I shan't enjoy it one bit now," she said, dismally. "Daisy, isn't it a disappointment?"

Mrs. Warriner was as cordial in her regret as her sister.

"Are you going to remain in mourning a whole year, Penelope?" she asked. "I mean are you going to live just as you are, and go nowhere?"

Penelope was gazing dreamily into the fire.

"Do you know," she said, softly, "it is not at all a disagreeable prospect. I am sure I shall be very happy and peaceful here, except, of course, on such occasions as when my friend Madge pays me a visit, which I hope will be very often. You are not exactly synonymous with peace, you know, Madgie dear. I came to live here on purpose to avoid society in the ordinary sense of the word. Had I done what my aunt, Mrs. Rochdale, desired, I should have made very different arrangements; but I don't regret my choice. I love my house, and I mean to try and be as happy as I can!"

"I don't think you will have to try very hard, Pen. I call it the dearest old place in the world, and I warn you I shall be dropping in upon you when you least expect me."

Penelope was only too glad to keep the conversation to this groove. She dreaded the introduction of Latimar's name; it was such pain to have to sit and hear again and again the story of Denis's unhappiness.

By some means or other the subject was not introduced, and by-and-by, when Madge went away to her own room, her sister stayed behind to say a few words about her to Penelope.

Those few words gave the girl a touch of real sincere joy and satisfaction, for they spoke of the strong friendship and interest that had arisen of late between Madge and Harold de Burgh, and of the possibility of something closer and more lasting springing from this friendship.

It was long since Penelope had heard anything directly of or from Mr. De Burgh; but she had never forgotten him, and her thoughts had always taken a sad tinge when he rose before her.

She could not bear to think she had given a moment's unhappiness to anyone, and she knew that the rector must have felt her refusal very keenly, although he had written a most gentle and kind answer to her letter at the time.

The prospect of his finding a wife and happiness with another gave Penelope great gladness, and relieved her heart of one of its ever present regrets.

"How glad I shall be. Oh! Daisy, I hope we shall see this come to pass."

Mrs. Warriner looked at the lovely face before her. Penelope, with her big eyes gleaming, her cheeks flushed, her hair falling about her in a cloud-like fashion, looked little more than a beautiful child.

The older woman recognized this loveliness with something of a pang, for she knew the secret of her sister's heart, and she feared a little, feared lest Harold de Burgh might not fall once more before the witchery of Penelope's sweet, big eyes, and that thus Madge's story would end in sorrow.

"Do not tell her I have spoken, Pen," she said. "After all, you know, it may come to nothing. These things fall through so often; but I hope, for her sake ——"

Penelope was full of quick sympathy.

"I will say nothing; but I am sure it will end well, Daisy. I know Mr. De Burgh always liked her. I have heard him speak of her so warmly time after time when he came to see my darling mother. Is he coming to the ball?"

"Not to dance, but to look on," Mrs. Warriner smiled. "I believe Harold would enjoy dancing, and sees no harm in it, but he has to subdue his inclinations to suit his parishioner's views. Of course you know he and Mrs. Latimar have come to daggers drawn—that is if one can use such a metaphor to such a man. Pen, my dear, what an odious creature she is, I never could endure her! What on earth ever induced Denis Latimar to make such a fool of himself is one of those things I shall never understand; but there, if I begin on this subject I shall keep you up all night, and you look very tired already. I don't think you are quite as robust as you used to be, little Pen. You must have someone to take care of you one of these days soon. Good-night, dear, and pleasant dreams!"

"Pleasant dreams!" Penelope murmured to herself as she sat alone by the dying fire. Why, the very thought of sleep was absent from her brain this night, though she was in truth very weary mentally and bodily. The knowledge that two miles away from her, under Lady Susan's roof, there was the one being on earth most dear, most treasured to her, was a thought that made her heart beat in a wild, stormy way that precluded all possibility of rest or sleep.

Must they meet? How would he look, would he be changed? Would there be lines round those dear beautiful eyes? Would silver threads have come into his hair? Would he be just what he had been? Oh! how she longed to see him once again! Just to let her hand rest in his strong, broad palm, just to feel that ineffable, exquisite sensation of joy, of comfort, of protection, when close to his tall well-knit form!

Penelope suddenly closed her hot eyes with her two hands, and prayed,—

"Dear Heaven, let me not see him. Give me grace and help that I may put him out of my heart. Help me to learn to live without him!"

* * * * *

Marcia put on her most gracious manner to Lady Susan, but she knew her efforts to win her hostess's good opinion and liking were all in vain. The fact that Lady Susan had taken no pains to cultivate her society had been a very sore point with Marcia back in the year that was gone. She had not given herself much trouble to ingratiate herself with Denis's great-aunt when they first met, and then afterwards, she had been much mortified when she found that Lady Susan politely but firmly avoided her.

Marcia was an absolute snob, and when the full value and significance of a close friendship with her husband's kinswoman came home to her, she was considerably annoyed with herself and with her luck for having progressed so ill with Lady Susan.

Later on she had almost forgotten this annoyance, and indeed Lady Susan's existence had passed for a time from her memory. On her arrival, however, at the pretty little country house, Marcia's vexation on this subject was revived, and made all the keener, because Lady Susan very speedily gave out a little of her deep affection for and interest in Penelope.

"We see a great deal of one another," Lady Susan had said, and Denis had winced as he listened. The colour came into his face hotly for an instant, and yet he thrilled at the mere possibility of seeing his love at any moment. And the old lady went on with the conversation, seeing nothing of this change, not a shade of which was lost on Marcia.

"I am afraid, though, that I shall not be able to give you much of your cousin's society, Mrs. Latimar—she has guests staying with her for the ball, and will be occupied all the time. Someone from your part of the world, Denis, I fancy—a young lady named Riley and her married sister!"

"So Penelope has to open her doors to her friend's chaperones although she dispenses with one for herself! Is it not a strange idea, her living alone? Lady Susan, surely you do not quite approve of such unconventionality, do you?"

"Well, I don't know. The world goes round a little quicker now than it did in my young days. Perhaps, if Penelope were anything but what she is in my eyes, and that comes very near perfection, Mrs. Latimar, I might object to the position; but, as it is!"—Lady Susan threw out her white, jewelled hands with a gesture that was peculiarly characteristic of her. "Well, Penelope is Penelope! and then—I am here, you know, in the event of her requiring anyone to help or advise her."

Marcia bit her lip and said something, she scarcely knew what. The glow on her husband's face, the expression in his eyes, sent the blood rushing madly through her veins and started the demon of her jealous passion. Lady Susan looked at her, as she sat very silent, and a great loathing, mingled with

[MARCIA WATCHED DENIS'S TALL, HANDSOME FIGURE DISAPPEAR AMONG THE TREES.]

something like fear, came into the old lady's mind for this richly clad, handsome, viperish-looking woman.

That night, as she put herself into her maid's hands, Lady Susan became lost in deep thought. Her attendant had been with her for years and was a privileged person. She was a good, faithful creature, with a strong, shrewd head, a sharp tongue, and a heart of gold.

"What for ever did Mr. Denis Latimar take that woman for his wedded wife?" said Shorten, as she was called, after a while breaking in unceremoniously on her mistress's reflections.

Lady Susan woke with a start.

"Shorten," she said, "I don't like Mrs. Latimar—nay, more than that, I positively dislike her; I think she is a dangerous woman!"

Shorten stopped in her ministrations a moment.

"Dear heart, my lady! How do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"As to that, Shorten, I can say nothing. Perhaps I am judging her wrongly, and if so I am very sorry; but there is a curious look in her eyes which I don't like, and which gives me an uneasy sort of sensation."

Shorten loved a mystery, like all her species.

"If she should be a murderess?" she began, breathlessly; but Lady Susan rapped her sharply over the knuckles with a hair-brush.

"Shorten, you are a ridiculous creature," she said, and then she laughed, it was such an absurd idea. "You must not go ahead at such a rate. A murderess! Good heavens, my good woman! what next, I wonder, and where is your common sense? Don't you know that there is much greater danger lying in wait for some people in this cruel world than the peaceful solution of death?"

Lady Susan was apt to forget her maid's intelligence was not quite up to her own standard, and would talk on dreamily at times as though Shorten could follow her every thought.

She paused a little, while she was divested of her silk gown, and garmented in another of a loose, soft description.

"No," she added, with a smile, "No, Shorten, you must not call Mrs. Latimar a murderess; it is an ugly name, and—well, rather an unwise one. Mrs. Latimar might object to it, Shorten."

"No doubt, my lady, she would," Shorten answered, calmly; "but it don't alter my opinion of her. I think I never saw a more evil look on any young woman's face; and I say again as I can't understand nohow why such a nice young man as Mr. Denis must needs go and tie himself up for life to a viper; and she is a viper, you mark my word, my lady. I heard her talking to her maid, Mrs. West, before dinner. Lor! I'd sooner serve in a gallery" (Shorten meant a galley, but the introduction of one letter more did not alter her sentiment) "than be under her! When Mrs. West come downstairs, my lady, she'd got a handful of broken sticks like in her hand, and she asked me for some glue to mend the sticks; and when I asked what they was intended for, she says her lady had swep' Miss Penelope's picture what stood on the mantel-shelf in the blue-room, and smashed it all to little bits. Mrs. West says it were a accident, but I've my my own idea about it. This sort of accident looks very like the act of a woman as gets into a fury and doesn't care what she destroys; now don't it, my lady?"

Lady Susan made no immediate reply, but sat with her brows contracted. When she did speak it was to dismiss her maid.

"I feel tired, you will be glad to hear, Shorten; and I think I shall sleep well to-night."

But after Shorten had gone the old lady made no haste to get to her rest. She sat staring into the fire with that same contraction on her brow, and a perturbed expression about her still pretty mouth.

"She hates Penelope; but why? What has the child done to her? Except that she is one of the sweetest of Heaven's creatures, what cause can Marcia Latimar have for hating her? and her hate is intense, I could read it in her eyes to-night. What does it mean? I feel somehow as if I were on the brink of some horrible discovery. I never remember to have had such an antipathy to any living creature as I have to this wife of Denis; but there, I am an old woman and my head is full of fancies. There is, after all, very little difference between Shorten and myself. She reads penny dreadfuls, and I invent them. What a foolish thing too much imagination may become! Here am I drawing pictures of some impossible harm that may happen to Penelope through the machinations of her cousin, and all because Mrs. Denis is undoubtedly jealous of my child's beautiful face. I think I had better go to bed and get rid of this nonsense in sleep!"

But although she forced herself to accept this common-sense view of the matter, Lady Susan was full of a vague uneasiness that would not be soothed or dismissed.

Was it a presentiment of coming events that filled her mind? Who shall answer such a question? These things are wrapped in the dark mantle of mystery and hidden away from human comprehension or solution.

(To be continued.)

THERE is one curious thing about the Russian winter. In the latter part of October or the first of November the weather will be as mild as it is here in September. Not a sign can be seen of an approaching change, when suddenly, without any apparent warning, a light haze will be seen in the northern sky, and in twenty-four hours the thermometer may fall 50°. The change is so sudden and violent that travellers are frequently frozen to death before they can gain shelter.

[A LITTLE EXCLAMATION FELL FROM DOLORES AS SHE LISTENED TO TRAVICE'S STORY!]

BASIL'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LAUREL VILLA.

The house to which Travice took her newly acknowledged daughter was a pretty little cottage standing some distance away from the road, from which it was separated by a shrubbery of laurels. To this latter fact may be attributed its name—Laurel Villa.

Evidently the elder woman had prepared herself for such an emergency as the present, for when the two travellers—having changed their cab on the way as a precaution against being followed—arrived at the cottage, they found everything in readiness for them, fires lighted, a dainty little meal in course of preparation, and the small sitting-room made gay with flowers.

"I remembered how fond you were of white chrysanthemums, so I wired down to Elspeth to procure as many as she could," said the mother, as she relieved Dolores of her cloak. "What do you think of the effect?"

"It is charming," returned the girl, sinking rather languidly into a puffy, luxurious-looking arm-chair drawn close up to the fire. "Indeed," glancing around "I think the whole room is charming."

And so indeed it was. The furniture was in excellent taste, the pictures on the walls were water-colours in flat gilt frames, the rugs on the floor were of eastern dyes, and the big brass pots of palms and ferns scattered profusely about, lent an air of Eastern luxury to the cosy English sitting-room.

"I am glad you like it," was the quiet but pleased comment.

"It is a perfect haven of rest after the haste and misery, and confusion of the last few days," went on Dolores, with a sigh. "But I cannot understand how it is you have hit on such a delightful little place, when you can have had such a short time for preparation."

Her hearer smiled.

"It is not such a wonder as you imagine. I have bought this house, and it has belonged to me for the last six months. It was here I lived before I went to you under the disguise of a servant, and during the interval Elspeth, the old woman who let us in, has been keeping it in readiness, not knowing what day I might return."

"But you did not expect I should come with you, surely?"

"I hardly know what I expected, Dolores. Anyhow, it is the unexpected that always happens."

Dolores had a vivid example of this truth a little later on, when her mother, after a short absence upstairs, joined her in the tiny drawing-room.

Short as her absence had been, it had been sufficient to work a tremendous change in her appearance, and when she first came in, Dolores started to her feet with a cry of amazement.

"Don't you know me, darling?" smiled her mother. "I have only discarded my wig and spectacles, both of which, to say the truth, I found a very great nuisance. What do you think of me now?"

"You are very beautiful," murmured the girl, hardly above her breath.

"Thank you, dear. That is the sweetest compliment I have had for many a long year."

And the compliment was not ill deserved. Travice had been a slender, stooping-shouldered, grey-headed woman, with a dull brown skin and habitually lowered eyes. This woman was tall and slender, she held herself erect with a haughty grace; her hair was jet black, and was coiled round and round her beautiful head in all its superb length; her skin was fine and clear, and flushed on the cheeks with crimson, while her eyes, which were large and dark flashed with an Empress's challenge.

Her dress too, was extremely becoming. It was a sort of tea-gown, of old gold silk, fitting closely to her magnificent figure, and softened at the neck and wrists with delicate Chantilly lace, caught at the throat with a diamond pin.

She had calculated on the effect her changed appearance would have on Dolores, and the result more than fulfilled her expectations.

"Come," she said, drawing her daughter's chair close to the table, "you must contrive to eat something, for Elspeth has evidently taken great pains over our repast, and she will be offended if we don't do it justice."

To Dolores it still seemed like a dream as she sat at the cosy little round table, with its silver bowl of chrysanthemums in the centre; but assuredly the meal itself was no dream, being indeed of sufficiently material proportions to have satisfied a gourmand. The soup was excellent, then followed filets of sole, fried a delicate golden brown, after that a pheasant, and finally sweets, and some luscious purple grapes by way of dessert. A contrast this to the meal Dolores had had yesterday, in her London garret, with its squalid surroundings.

She was absolutely longing to ask her mother a host of questions with regard to the past, but the latter with infinite tact contrived to prevent them being uttered.

"We will not speak of unpleasant things in this first hour of our reunion, my darling!" she said, when they had drawn up to the blazing wood fire, and sat side by side on a settee, Dolores' hand clasped in her mother's. "It is enough for us that we are together, with no third person to come between us. Later on painful questions must be discussed; but now I want to avoid exciting you more than I can possibly help, for Heaven knows you have had excitement enough lately!"

To this Dolores assented with a pale smile, as she lay back against her cushion, and her

mother, noticing how white she was, vacated her seat, and made the young girl recline.

"Try and sleep, dearest," she said, softly, "and I will remain here on this stool, and watch that no one disturbs you."

It was easier to give the command than to get it obeyed. Dolores was in no mood for sleep, but she closed her eyes and lay quite still, while the elder woman's gaze remained fixed on her face with a deep impassioned love that cannot be described in words.

Every now and again she stooped down to press her lips on her new found daughter's dress, and a thrill of perfect ecstasy seemed to pass through her.

"My child," she murmured, with something of the rapture of a young mother for her first-born infant, "my own—mine only!"

Once or twice a shadow darkened her face as if some unpleasant thought forced its way upon her, but it was driven back with fierce determination.

"I care for nothing so long as I have her!" she muttered to herself, "and nothing shall take her from me now!"

This was a moment towards which she had been looking for years—for which she had planned, schemed, suffered, and sinned. Hard indeed would it be if the fruits of her triumph were snatched from her grasp before she had even tasted their sweetness.

Outside the November evening darkened into night. A soft west wind, laden with moisture, sighed and soughed round the little villa, and swept discontentedly through the laurel foliage that shut it in from the road. It was a very quiet little house, almost as quiet as if it had been situated in the very heart of the country. There was never much traffic in the road outside, and that little ceased altogether after nightfall. Presently Elspeth came in, with a little lamp in her hand, and after she had pulled down the blinds and withdrawn, Dolores opened her eyes.

"Have you been asleep, dearest?" asked her companion.

"No; I think I have been in a sort of waking dream."

"And the subject of it?"

But this Dolores would not tell. The subject of it had been Basil. She was wondering how he had received the news of her flight, and whether at this moment he was rejoicing at the certainty that never more would he be troubled by the sight of his unloved wife—the wife, too, who had been guilty of such a fearful crime as he had charged her with!

And she, in spite of everything, in spite of herself even, she was eating her very heart out for love of him. Other things sank into merest insignificance, yes, even this strange and startling discovery of a mother whom she had imagined to be dead, faded into a secondary importance, before the overwhelming dominion that Basil had unconsciously established over her.

"Dolores!" exclaimed her companion suddenly, "do you know that you have not yet called me mother?"

Dolores started, and grew red.

"Have I not? Then I will do so now,—Mother!"

But there was a strained sound in her voice as she pronounced the word—a certain something that even to herself did not ring quite true.

Travice noticed it, and her face grew very pale, while she pressed one hand hard against her breast.

"Oh, my daughter!" she said, in a melancholy voice, "nature has not taught you her lesson so well as she has taught it to me. Perhaps I cannot expect it. But many a time, even when I was supposed to be your maid, I fancied that instinct was whispering to you to love me."

"And you were right!" interrupted Dolores, touched to the heart by the intense sadness of the woman's tone. "Of course I love you—very much indeed, and each day will teach me to love you more."

"Yes, yes!" Travice repeated, agreeing with quick eagerness, while the colour rose once more to her face, "that is true. Now that I have you all to myself, and free from malign influence, you will soon grow fond of me. It is only natural—whom else have you to bestow your affection upon? We will go away to France, darling, where we shall be free from all the miserable associations of the past, and we will live a life of such happiness as few mortals even dream of. Ah, but we will be happy indeed!"

She was smiling, radiant with enthusiasm. Of any possible drawbacks to the felicity she painted she would not allow herself to think. Her daughter was all in all to her, and she would be all in all to her daughter.

Dolores' next words recalled her from the Elysium in which she had been dwelling for the last few moments.

"Will not this be a good time to give me the explanation you promised me? We are alone, and there is no danger of interruption."

Travice shivered a little, and flashed a swift glance into her daughter's face. Perhaps that glance decided her, for she said in a low voice, "As you will, dearest. I would have put off the evil moment as long as possible if you would have allowed me, but, maybe, it is better to get it over without delay."

"Why will the moment be evil?"

"Because I shall have to confess a fault of my own, and at the same time, betray the faults of other people. But you must judge as leniently as you can, Dolores. Remember that goodness and virtue are easy to those who have never had temptation thrown in their way. I must begin my story at the very beginning, and that will take me back many weary years—before you were born in fact."

She paused for a moment, looking into the red heart of the fire, as if she sought for some inspiration there. Then she proceeded in a low but rapid tone with her recital.

"My early girlhood was passed in India, where my father had a civil appointment. I and my sister Aline were his only children, and we were twins. When I was about eighteen I was married to an officer in the Army named Daore, and some time later my sister married an English gentleman, who had come over to India on a pleasure trip—or at least it was in reality a pleasure trip, although the reason he himself gave for undertaking the journey was a desire to study the religion of India. He was a man of an imaginative and mystical turn of mind, to whom anything in the way of occult research had an immense interest, and at that time he especially concerned himself with Theosophy, and the wonders that were practised by its votaries."

"Why!" exclaimed Dolores. "That description would apply to my own father!"

Her companion made a quick motion of silence.

"Hush, dearest! Don't interrupt me. When I have finished you can say what you like, and ask me as many questions as you like. All will be clear to you later on, only hear me to the end. This gentleman of whom I am speaking, and who for the present I will call Sigismund, married Aline, my sister, and took her back to England with him, while I remained in India. My life there was not happy. I will not refer to it more than I can help, but it is necessary for me to tell you that my husband was in debt when we were married, and I, knowing nothing of this, indulged in various extravagances that plunged us in money difficulties. Our situation got from bad to worse, and finally Major Daore committed suicide."

A little exclamation of horror fell from Dolores, and Travice herself had to moisten her dry lips before she could go on with her story. Presently she proceeded,—

"Of the shock to myself I will not speak. I was expecting the birth of my baby in three months, and that made my situation all the more deplorable. However, I came to England, and naturally enough went to the house of my sister to take refuge. We had always been very devoted to each other, and no doubt of her affection ever crossed my mind. She and her husband were then living at Priors Abbey, quite close to Chesham Royal—a strange coincidence is it not? Well, my sister Aline received me lovingly enough, but her husband did not like me, and he made me understand that it was simply and solely for her sake that he found me a home. However, there I stayed until my baby was born—a little girl, yourself in fact, Dolores—and about a week later my sister, too, had a little girl.

"She was very like you, as it was natural she should be, for Aline and I resembled each other, and the children were like us rather than like their fathers' families. Poor Aline was very ill indeed, and the baby had to be taken from her, and put to nurse with a young woman named Sara Harding, who lived in one of the cottages near the Abbey, and who had lost her own little child a short time previously. Days passed on, and Aline was still confined to her room, and unable to have her baby with her, so it fell to me to be with her constantly, and at this time my nurse was forced to go away, so my baby was also put under the care of Sara Harding, and I used to go and see the children every day. Now I come to the most painful part of what I have to tell you; but if I erred then, and I know I did, I paid for my sin dearly enough afterwards. Aline's poor little baby was weak and ailing. It seemed doubtful whether she could live, but this we did not tell the poor mother, who was, of course, not in a fit condition to hear such news. As for Sigismund, so absorbed was he in the care of his wife to whom he was passionately devoted, that he took little or no interest in his child.

"Thus it fell to my lot to look after the children, and one afternoon when I went to the cottage, I found the little Dolores looking very ill. Sara Harding declared her conviction that the child would not recover, and then an idea came to me of changing the two babes, and letting my own child take the place of Aline's. I know it was wicked, but don't judge me too harshly, the temptation was very great. I had not a farthing of my own, while my sister and her husband were absolutely rolling in riches, as the saying goes. Their child would naturally have every advantage in the way of bringing up that wealth could bestow, and would be an heiress, while mine would be a pauper. From my bridal presents I had one valuable piece of jewellery left—a diamond necklet, and with this I bribed Sara Harding. So the poor ailing babe was supposed to be mine, while the strong one was believed to be the little heiress of the Abbey."

Farther and farther back had Dolores drawn from the speaker. A blank horror had overspread her face, but she said nothing. She would hear this wretched tale to the end, and then—well then it would be time enough to try and think it out. At present she only dimly comprehended it.

"Just then, I had to leave the Abbey in order to go up to London to meet a false charge that was brought against me of attempting to defraud my husband's creditors, by appropriating certain securities that he was said to have possessed," went on the elder woman, and it was easy to see from her moved features that the recital, and the remembrances it called up, had agitated her very considerably. "Of course I had to leave the children behind me with Sara Harding. I was absent a month, and when I returned I was met with the news that something had happened to our little girl. She had died suddenly from the effects of croup. You understand the position, Dolores? the child that was supposed to be mine had died, while the child that was really mine was alive and well, and now up at the Abbey with my sister Aline, who had recovered sufficiently to have it with her."

"You mean," said Dolores, faintly, "that I was that child?"

"Yes, you were that child, and my one comfort was that your welfare was as-

cured. Sigismund, my brother-in-law, judged me harshly then, as he continued to do all his life, and although I had been acquitted of the charge brought against me of taking the securities, he professed to believe that I was guilty, and peremptorily forbade my staying at the Abbey. He would not even let me see my sister, and so I did not see you either just then, but went back to London, and there remained for three months. All the misery and anxiety I had gone through began to tell upon me, and I was very ill. It was a dreadful time," she added, shuddering. "I was homeless, penniless, and I had a fearful struggle even for the bare means of subsistence. But through it all, I had one consolation—the knowledge that my child was provided for, and that even if I died she would be all right. At last I was taken to a hospital, and then my sister was communicated with, and she came to see me.

"Her horror at my position was extreme, and through her entreaties her husband allowed me to be taken to the Abbey as soon as my convalescence permitted of my being moved.

"For a few weeks I was completely happy—I saw you every day, and no one wondered at my devotion to you—was it not natural that I should be devoted to my only sister's child? A good deal of my time was spent in your nursery, where you were tended by Sara Harding, who now acted as your nurse, and the only cloud on my horizon was the fear that the time might come when I should have again to leave the Abbey, and should therefore be separated from you. All at once a change came. A young man who chose to call himself Max Lester arrived at the Abbey, and between this young man and myself an instinctive antipathy seemed to spring up. I disliked him, he mistrusted me. At the same time he was devoted to my sister, and there seemed a certain amount of affection between him and my brother-in-law. It was easy enough to discover that there was a mystery about this young man. He never went beyond the grounds of the house, he never saw visitors—his very presence was unsuspected by anyone outside the Abbey gates, and there was in his manner a certain uneasy alertness that was in itself suspicious. Clearly he had a secret, and ere long I discovered what this secret was."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOLORES DOUBTS.

TRAVICE was not at ease during her narration. Her eyes hardly once left her daughter's face, and there was a strained anxious look in them, bearing witness to uncertainty and disquietude. She made frequent pauses, too, in her story, as though she were debating on the best way of telling it so as to least shock Dolores' sensibilities, and occasionally, on the other hand, she spoke very rapidly, as if she wished to get the unpleasant task over as quickly as possible.

"Max Lester was very fond of children," she continued, "and he too spent a considerable portion of his time in the nursery with you, so that he saw a good deal of your nurse, Sara Harding. This young woman had a ne'er do well sort of husband—a man who was suspected of having been a poacher, and who found it difficult to earn an honest living in consequence. He was anxious to emigrate, the only difficulty in the way of his doing this being the lack of necessary funds.

"If I had had money I would have given it to him, but unfortunately I myself was as poor as he was, so it was out of the question that I should help him.

"This, however, did not apply to Max Lester, who seemed to be pretty well off, and who interested himself strongly on behalf of Jonas Harding.

"Of course, personally I was very anxious that the Hardings should leave England, for only with their absence could I feel that my secret was safe. I therefore strongly urged upon them the advantages of going to Australia if they could get anyone to advance the money for the voyage, and at last, to my great delight, Sara told me that they had decided on going, as Mr. Lester had offered them a hundred pounds to set them up afresh and give Jonas a new start in a new world.

"My satisfaction at this announcement was dashed by something curious in the woman's manner—something that made my heart stand still with the fear that she might have confessed that it was my sister's child who had died, and not mine as was supposed. I dared not ask her, but the time between that and her departure was fraught with a terrible anxiety to me. So feverishly anxious was I, that I even went down to Southampton to see the Hardings off, and thus to make sure that they had really left England.

"When I was on board, wishing the woman good-bye, she suddenly exclaimed, I haven't behaved altogether well with you, and if the time ever comes when I can send you back the value of the diamond necklace you gave me, I'll do it.' Startled, I asked her what she meant. 'You have not betrayed me?' I said, and at that very moment the bell rang for clearing the vessel, and she had only time to whisper 'Mr. Lester knows everything!' before an official pushed me on the gangway, telling me I must go.

"There was no alternative for me, and I have not seen or heard of Sara Harding from that day to this!"

"I went back to the Abbey, quite prepared to hear that my secret had been divulged by this Max Lester," she went on, presently, "but in this expectation I was disappointed. Whatever the young man knew he kept to himself. I think the reason of this lay in the fact that I had surprised his own secret, and this gave me a certain amount of power over him. Accidentally I discovered that he had been concerned in a Nihilist plot in Russia, and that the Russian police were even at that moment on his track. He was in reality hiding at Priors Abbey under a false name, and if I had chosen to give information against him," a curious look came in her eyes, "I could have consigned him once more to the mines of Siberia. Perhaps the knowledge of this kept him silent; anyhow, he never betrayed me, and soon afterwards he disappeared from the Abbey suddenly and mysteriously. Unhappily at that very time my sister Aline disappeared also, and my brother-in-law, who had before this shown signs of jealousy, decided that the two had eloped together. His shame was so great at his supposed disgrace that he left Priors Abbey almost immediately after, changed his name, and went to live in an old château in France where no one was likely to suspect who he really was. He took you with him, but absolutely refused to allow me to accompany you. At first I thought I would confess everything to him and claim you as my child, for the idea of separation from you was unendurable to me; then I resolved to attempt to succeed by stratagem, so I disguised myself as a Hindoo.

"My long residence in India had familiarised me with the language, and by representing myself as starving in a foreign country, I induced Sigismund to let me enter his household. At this time he had taken up his former occult studies again, and I was what is called in spiritualistic language a very good medium, besides I knew something of the science which he was striving to master, so after awhile I was permitted to assist him in his experiments. Of course, it was impossible that I could conceal my identity from him for long, but by the time he found out who I was, I had contrived to make myself very useful to him, and more than that, I had succeeded in gaining your childish affections. I implored my brother-in-law to let me remain in his household, if only for the sake of the love I bore my supposed niece, yourself, and I promised that if he gave me the permission, I would continue to wear the disguise I had assumed, and would never give you any cause to suspect I was other than the person I pretended to be. At last he consented, though very unwillingly, and you will bear witness, Dolores, that I kept my word to him?"

"Yes," said Dolores, in a low voice, "I certainly never suspected Abdul of being a woman."

"I do not know that there is very much more left for me to tell," pursued the other, knitting her brows reflectively. "You know how we left France when your education was supposed to be complete, and then came to Highgate. You know, too, the retired life we always led. And now, darling, it only remains for me to ask you to forgive me if you think I have sinned, and to remember that it has been for your dear sake."

She would have embraced Dolores, but the latter drew back.

"Wait!" she exclaimed, peremptorily, "I have still some questions to put to you. You say my father," unconsciously she still called him by the long familiar title, "changed his name when he left Priors Abbey. What, then, was his real name?"

"St. Maur—Sigismund St. Maur."

"Then the body of the poor woman whom we found in the cavern, you and I, was his wife?"

"Yes, your aunt Aline."

"What brought her there?"

The woman looked startled at her tone.

"My darling, I know no more than yourself."

"Then the finding of the body was as great a surprise to you as it was to me?"

"Quite—and even more."

"And yet," said Dolores, doubtfully, "you led me to the cavern, so it was clear you knew of its existence."

"True, I knew of its existence, but if I had suspected what it contained, do you think that the riches of the Indies would have induced me to enter it?"

"No," murmured the girl, "I suppose not."

"Aline and I discovered the place accidentally once when we were out walking. We had a fox terrier with us, and he chased some sort of vermin—a rat, or a rabbit, I forget which—into the cavern, and we followed. We promised each other never to mention the fact to anyone, but to keep it secret between our two selves."

She did not add the reason of this compact of secrecy, or that the discovery of the cavern took place at the time when she herself was under fear of arrest for the abstraction of those securities of her husband's—Major Dacre.

Aline St. Maur had fancied the cavern would provide a good hiding place for her sister in case a warrant for her apprehension should be issued, and it was this consideration that had induced her not to mention its existence even to her husband.

"My only solution of the matter is that Aline took shelter there herself from a storm, and then was seized by one of the heart attacks, to which she had been subject since her early girlhood," added the woman who has been known to us under so many different aliases, but whom we will in future call by the name that was legally hers—Mrs. Dacre. "For my own part I never believed that she had eloped with Max Lester, even when facts seemed so strongly against her. My own opinion was that an accident of some kind had befallen her, and the event proved me right."

"And this Max Lester—what has become of him?" queried Dolores.

A swift look of hatred flashed across her mother's handsome face. It was a minute before she replied, shortly.—

"That I cannot tell you—at present. It may be necessary to speak of him later on. But surely, Dolores," she went on, with a sudden burst of impassioned tenderness, "we need not waste our time in talking of this long dead past. We have the future to think of, dearest, and the present—the beautiful, all-satisfying present! Remember this is the first time for seventeen years that I have had

you to myself—the first time that I have dared to look into your sweet eyes, and see mirrored back the affection that is in my heart!

"Tell me Dolores, that you think I have been justified in what I have done. I shall feel happier when I have had the assurance from your lips."

But it was an assurance the young girl could not give her. Dolores' sense of honour was very keen, and affection itself could not blind her to her mother's faults, or rather to that one great fault which Adela Dacre admitted because circumstances would no longer allow her to conceal it.

No, Dolores felt that nothing could condone such a wrong as this. The wrong was not to herself, but to those unfortunate parents who had been so cruelly deceived. Involuntarily the girl shrank farther away, and her face grew cold and hard.

"Ah!" cried her companion, striking her hands passionately together. "You turn from me—you judge me harshly—you will not let my great love plead for me! Think of all I have suffered, Dolores—think how hard these years of virtual separation from you have been! Surely you are capable of judging the extent of my sacrifice!"

"Hush," said the girl, in a choked voice, and with a little outward gesture of her hands, "don't ask me any more questions now, for I am utterly incapable of answering them. I am bewildered with what you have told me. It all seems a nightmare, from which I shall presently wake up. Leave me to myself a little while, and then perhaps the mists will have cleared away from my brain."

Without a word Mrs. Dacre rose from her kneeling position on the hearthrug, which position she had preserved since she first began her confession, and left the room. A very tempest of sorrow convulsed her soul. It would have been rage if anyone save her daughter had been in question, but towards Dolores she could never feel anything that so much as savoured of wrath. Was she not flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone, the incarnation of her own lovely youth, with the added dower of a sweetness and purity such as she, alas! had never been able to lay claim to?

Suppose, after all, this supreme venture of her life ended in disappointment. Suppose, oh, Heaven! Dolores continued to shrink from her, and her joys of motherhood turned to dust and ashes between her teeth. Dead Sea Fruit, that, fair enough to look upon, left the bitterness of death upon the lips!

She ground her teeth together in a very impotence of despair, and falling on her knees in the little passage outside the drawing-room, she lifted her hands to Heaven, as if she would mutely pray for mercy.

* * * * *

Meanwhile poor Dolores—a quaint-looking little figure, with a white bandage round her brows, lay back on her pillow, groping blindly in the mist that seemed to surround her. To do her justice, she tried very hard to think of her newly-discovered mother with the tenderness that she felt was her due, but in spite of all her efforts there remained something forced in her affection. It did not flow naturally as it should have done.

Then, too, it was a great shock, and a fearful wrench to find that her so-called father—the man who had been all in all to her during her seventeen years of maidenhood, the man for whom she had felt the most devoted affection—was after all not her father. In point of fact, not one drop of his blood flowed in her veins. She was only the daughter of his wife's sister,

Over and over again she told herself that it was not her place to judge her mother's sin, No doubt that sin had been long repented of, and consequently wiped out. But it was all of no avail. Dolores could not conceal from herself the fact that between her and her mother lay a great gulf, which on her part, at least, could never be bridged over.

What a strange jumble it was! For seventeen years she had lived the very quietest, most retired and humdrum existence it is possible to imagine, and then all of a sudden life became complicated with a dozen new issues, and of late her experiences had surely been more stormy and turbulent than fell to the lot of one woman out of a thousand!

And she had no one to help her—no one to whom she could turn in her uncertainty. Then her thoughts flew to Lascelles. Yes, she felt she could trust him. More than that, she had confidence alike in his honour and his calm judgment. If anyone could help her, he could. But there was no chance of her seeing him!

Suddenly the silence of the little villa was disturbed by a loud ringing of the bell—a ringing that sent the echoes flying from basement to garret, and startled Dolores as much as it alarmed her mother.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

In a sitting-room of the Grand Hotel, looking idly out of the window, was Miss Beatrice Risdon. It was the afternoon after Dolores' flight from Chesham Royal, a fact of which Beatrice was, of course, in ignorance.

The young lady had come up to town with "Aunt Anne" to wit, Miss Risdon, senior, ostensibly for the purposes of shopping, but really because she found the old house in Hampshire so dull that she felt she could stand it no longer.

"It's worse than Mariana in her moated Grange!" she grumbled one morning to her aunt—a sweet old lady with a double row of snow-white corkscrew curls on either side of her fair old face. "At least she had the prospect of her lover's arrival, but I haven't even that!"

"As far as I can make out, that is your own fault, my dear," equably answered the old lady. "I daresay you could have found lovers in plenty at the big houses where you have been staying this autumn, if you had chosen."

"Yes, and what were they worth?" snapped Beatrice, whose usually sweet temper seemed to have undergone a change for the worse lately; "a set of fortune-hunters, who came after me for the sake of my money, or else wanted to amuse themselves at my expense."

"You are rather hard on them, my love."

"Not half so hard as they deserve. The wretches! I don't believe in men. They are the torments of a woman's life."

"Torments which some women seem to be able to put up with pretty comfortably," murmured Aunt Anne, without looking up from the fleecy meshes of her wools.

In spite of herself Beatrice burst into a laugh.

"You are right, dear. But then, as you often tell me, girls don't know what is good for them."

"I know what isn't good for them!" exclaimed the old lady with some vigour; "and that is to be shut up in a dreary country-house with only an old woman for company! My dear, we have had enough of Hampshire. Let us go to London and stay there for a fortnight. There are one or two good things on at the theatres, and I daresay we shall contrive to amuse ourselves."

"Why, you dissipated old creature! I verily believe you are longing for the fleshpots of Egypt, too," exclaimed Beatrice. Then she went over to her aunt, and gave her a comfortable hug. "I think it is about the best thing we can do," she added; and so to London they went.

But this morning Beatrice was waking up to the unpleasant fact that change of scene does not necessarily mean change of thought. The remembrance of Darcy Munroe haunted her quite as much here in the great heart of London as it had done away in the quiet country; and though she was angry with herself for her folly, the folly did not yield in the least degree to the anger.

Why had he not been as true and single-hearted as she thought him? Then, in spite of his poverty and her riches, things might have come all right between them. But he had never really cared for her. They happened to be in the same house together, and so he amused himself, and all the while he was engaged to someone else!

Beatrice had been to three theatres, had haunted such picture-galleries and art-exhibitions as were open, had shopped until her room looked like a draper's emporium, and had adopted every expedient she could think of for stifling that "vain regret," which was eating at her heart. It was all of little avail. Regret was stronger than she was, and this morning she was telling herself it was no good struggling any longer.

Just as she arrived at this conclusion, a waiter brought in a letter for her. It proved to be from Eulalie Stanhope—a fact that caused Beatrice some astonishment, for it was not often she numbered the fair Eulalie among her correspondents. When she had read it, however, she had no difficulty in understanding the spiteful motive of the writer, for Eulalie was anxious to lose no time in publicly announcing the news of Mrs. Basil Chesham's elopement.

"For of course she has eloped," wrote the young lady, "although it seems probable that when she left the house she was alone. For my own part, I have no doubt that she has gone to that handsome Mr. Lascelles, who, you will remember, paid her so much attention while you were at Chesham Royal. I have not seen Basil since the sad affair, for he is only just recovering from an illness, and has not yet been downstairs. It is a terrible scandal for him, and for Lord and Lady Chesham as well. My lord is furious; he stamps and raves about the house, making everybody thoroughly uncomfortable. As for her ladyship, she is dissolved in tears, and keeps on repeating her belief in Dolores' innocence. Of course it is great nonsense, as she will see later on. My opinion is that one ought to take affairs like this as much as possible in the matter-of-fact way—and indeed, in this special one I don't see much cause for surprise. Basil made an extraordinary match in a great hurry, and now he is repenting the consequences of it. Let me hear from you soon—it is quite a long time since I had a letter from you."

Beatrice read this epistle over twice, then she threw it on the floor, and stamped her smartly shod little foot upon it.

"Nasty spiteful thing!" she exclaimed, aloud "She is absolutely rejoicing over poor Dolores's flight. She thinks Basil will get a divorce, and she will become Mrs. Chesham after all. But why on earth should she take the trouble to write to me? I understand that she wishes to make the news public property as soon as possible, but it strikes me there is another reason. I wonder what it is."

She pondered a few minutes, then an idea struck her.

"I have it!" she murmured, "Eulalie thinks it is just on the cards Dolores has come to me, so she wishes to get me to write to her, and thus make sure. Well, I'll disappoint her; for I won't take the smallest notice of her letter, and she can think exactly what she likes."

The intelligence had given a new direction to Beatrice's thought. She was very fond of Dolores, and in spite of Eulalie's insinuations, she did not for a moment believe in the young wife having eloped with Lascelles.

Just as she came to this conclusion, her eyes, which were idly gazing at the passers by, suddenly grew keen and alert. A man had driven up to the door of the hotel in a hansom, and as he sprang out and paid the driver, she recognised the very person of whom she was thinking—Lascelles.

Beatrice was nothing if not impetuous. A minute later, and to aunt Anne's great astonishment, she had run out of the room,

and was standing on the landing, looking down stairs at the people in the vestibule, amongst whom was Lascelles.

He saw her at once, and came upstairs to meet her.

"You are the very person I wanted to speak to," exclaimed the young girl, without troubling to go through the form of a conventional greeting, "I have just had bad news, and you may be able to tell me if it is true."

"Bad news!" he repeated, and he smiled, for it seemed very unlikely that he—who knew Miss Risdon so slightly—would be able to satisfy her on such a point. "Whom does your bad news concern?"

"Dolores Chesham."

A change came over his face at once.

"What of her?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"She has run away from Chesham Royal. Do you know where she is now!"

The point-blank question certainly embarrassed him, and his manner was quite sufficient answer to it

"Ah!" she exclaimed, quickly, "I see you do. Pray tell me her whereabouts; remember, I am her friend, and anything that I could do to help her I would do, no matter at what sacrifice to myself."

"That is the speech of a true-hearted woman, and if Mrs. Chesham could hear it she would thank you with her whole heart," replied Lascelles; but it occurred to Beatrice that even as he said this he was only taking time for consideration. He added, after a slight pause, "I am afraid you will think I am not acting quite candidly with you, but I think it best for the present not to answer your question. This much I may tell you—Mrs. Chesham is safe, and if you like, I will communicate with you later on. Shall you be still at this hotel?"

"Yes, for the next week or so."

"Then I will write to you. Now you must excuse me. I have an important business appointment with a gentleman who is staying here, and I am already late. Good-bye."

He raised his hat and was gone, while Beatrice still stood on the landing, very dissatisfied with the result of the interview.

What did it mean? Clearly Lascelles knew where Dolores was, but he would not divulge it. But why should the young wife's whereabouts be made such a secret?

Beatrice shook her head with slow disapproval as she retraced her steps towards her aunt's sitting-room. Before she reached it, a young man who was tearing downstairs in a very great hurry, cannoned up against her and came to a pause in order to apologise.

"I beg your pardon; I——Beatrice!"

His astonishment would not allow him to get any further, and even Miss Risdon, self-possessed as she usually was, found herself at a disadvantage, for the gentleman was none other than Lieutenant Darcy Munroe!

"What brings you here?" she asked him, unceremoniously.

"I am under orders for India, so I am staying in town to get my things ready," he stammered, and his confusion was so great that Beatrice instantly concluded the "things" meant the masculine equivalent for trousseau.

"Oh, so you are going to India?" she said, slowly. "And I suppose Mrs. Munroe is going with you?"

"Mrs. Munroe!" he repeated, bewilderedly.

"I mean your wife."

"I am not married."

"No, but you will be before you start."

"Shall I?" he said, looking at her rather comically. "I did not know it."

"Then are you going to leave your *fiancée* behind you?"

"I have no *fiancée*, Miss Risdon. You are talking in riddles."

"Am I? Well, there is such a thing as solving riddles, isn't there?"

"Not in this semi-public place," he returned, quickly, and with a glance at the people who were ascending and descending the staircase. "I suppose you are staying here? Won't you ask me into your sitting-room?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But," demurely, "you were in such a hurry that I should have thought you would have had no time for such frivolity as stopping to talk to me."

"I was in a hurry, I confess it, for I was going to my tailor's. But the man can wait," he added, recklessly, as he followed Beatrice into the sitting-room.

Aunt Anne had disappeared. The two young people had the room to themselves—a boon for which one of them at least breathed a prayer of supreme thankfulness.

"Now," said Darcy, standing in an attitude of "attention," "I am at your service, Miss Risdon."

Not until then had the comic aspect of the situation struck Beatrice. She looked at him for a minute, then they simultaneously burst into a laugh.

What they laughed at it would be a little difficult to say, unless, indeed, it was due to the fact that each was so unfeignedly glad to see the other. Pride and misapprehension had stepped in between them, but it had not killed their unconfessed love.

"So you are going to India," said Beatrice at last, in a deliberate voice. "And how long shall you be absent, pray?"

"I don't know," lugubriously. "'It may be for years, or it may be for ever,' as the old song says."

"And the sentiment is not worth the old song," put in Beatrice, quickly. Then she added, "Are you glad to leave England?"

"I'm not quite sure. My feelings are a little mixed. For some things I am very glad. Anyhow it will be a change, and I think that is what I have been longing for."

"The worst of change is, one so soon becomes accustomed to it," observed the young lady, reflectively. "Now, if one could keep on changing, there might be something in it."

After this there was a pause, which neither of them seemed inclined to break. Beatrice occupied it in staring intently at her smart little shoes, while Darcy never removed his eyes from her face.

Looking up sharply, she met his glance fully, and her face instantly became suffused with scarlet.

To blush—and for nothing—was a weakness of which Beatrice strongly disapproved. She was very angry with herself, but the effect of this anger was a desire to visit it on the innocent head of poor Darcy.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" she exclaimed, snappishly. "Don't you know it is very rude to stare a lady out of countenance as you were doing?"

"Was I doing so?"

"Certainly."

"I am very sorry," said the young man, contritely. Then he plucked up spirit. "After all, I'm not sure that I am sorry; you see, it will be many years before I see you again."

"And when you do, I shall be old and wrinkled, and careworn! Was that what you were thinking?"

"No. Would you really like to know my thoughts—my real, actual thoughts, I mean?"

Beatrice hesitated. It was rather a risk to say "yes" certainly; but, on the other hand, her curiosity was piqued, and, as might have been predicted, all her scruples gave way before it.

"Well, yes, I should like to know," she answered, with a fine affectation of indifference—so transparent an affectation, however, that it did not even take in Darcy.

He came a little nearer to her.

"I was thinking how much I should like your photograph," he said, boldly. "You promised it me once—do you recollect?"

"Yes, but that was before——" She checked herself abruptly.

It was really very provoking, but she had made two or three slips of the tongue already in this interview, and such slips were decidedly unusual with her.

"Before that accursed picnic!" he said, completing her sentence for her. "Oh, Beatrice, that was indeed a 'black letter day' in my life! It has altered everything."

His voice broke a little, and he half turned away.

Strangely enough, Beatrice felt a lump rising in her own throat. Perhaps it was the effects of sympathy.

"It was all your own fault!" she exclaimed, presently. "Why did you deceive me?"

"I didn't deceive you."

"Yes you did!" politely contradicting him. "You never told me you were engaged to be married to a horrid blackamoor, with heaps of money!"

"But I wasn't engaged," he exclaimed, in eager self vindication, and by way of convincing her the more readily, he came close to her and caught hold of both her hands. "It is quite true my father had a ward who was an heiress, and whom he wished me to marry, and ten to one I should have married her if I had never seen you. But I fell head over ears in love with you the first time I ever saw you, and you know it!"

"How should I know it? You never told me."

"No, because I never had a chance of doing so. Besides, you see," he floundered about in some embarrassment at this juncture, "you had money, and I was a poor impecunious younger son, with nothing but my pay and a paltry hundred or two a year that a godmother left me. What was a fellow to do?"

"You wouldn't have minded asking the blackamoor to marry you—that is, supposing your affections had not been engaged elsewhere," said Beatrice, with demure mischief.

"Oh, but that was a different thing."

"Why different?"

"Well, I shouldn't have cared tuppence whether she took me or left me."

"Poor blackamoor!" The lady in question, by the way, was as fair as Beatrice herself. "What is she doing now?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm afraid I don't want to know either."

"Then you have not proposed to her since the picnic?"

"No."

"And don't intend to?"

"Certainly not."

"But what will your father say?"

"He can't say more than he has said," replied the young man, grimly.

Then he broke into a laugh, as if at the remembrance of a scene that was irresistibly funny.

"By Jove! The governor did lamm into me, and no mistake, when I refused to have anything to do with his ward. He got quite black in the face, and I really thought he would have ended in a fit of apoplexy. But he didn't," added Darcy, more seriously. "He recovered and ordered me out of the house, which relieved his feelings and acted as a sort of safety valve."

Beatrice was silent, and Darcy imitated her example. Suddenly she drew from her waistbelt her pretty little diamond encrusted watch, and looked at the dial.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "what on earth can have become of Aunt Anne? I will go and bring her in, and introduce her to you."

The ruse had its desired effect. Darcy caught imploringly at her sleeve.

"Wait a minute, Beatrice. I want to ask you one question before you go."

Beatrice paused, and the pretty dimples played a delicious game of hide-and-seek in her cheeks.

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you give me your photograph to take to India with me?"

"Is that all?" exclaimed the girl. Then,

with downcast eyes and cheeks rivalling the reddest-hearted damask rose that ever bloomed, she added, demurely, "I thought your question would be of much more importance than that!"

And having uttered this daring speech she tried to get away. But Darcy was too quick for her.

In another moment his arms were round her, his breath was on her cheek, his kisses were on her lips, and for the space of a few minutes these two foolish young people took a journey into a certain delightful land where summer always reigns, and roses and passion-flowers are always in bloom, a land fairer than Eve's Paradise, even before the beguiling snake left his trail on the flowers. A land that we call Elysium, and that opens its gates only to the magic touch of youth and love.

And Aunt Anne, coming in suddenly, was extremely scandalised at the outside view she caught of this lovely country. But then, it had never been her lot to enter the golden gates!

(To be continued.)

THE RAVENDALE MYSTERY.

CHAPTER XVII.

"TRAPPED!"

Had a thunderbolt fallen it could not have caused one half the surprise that followed upon this announcement of Fricker's, to which he had led up so that it should produce the greatest possible effect.

Not once during his recital of the case had he committed himself to any actual statement about the murder.

He had kept his audience on tenterhooks. He had given them facts enough to make a black case against Mrs. Vance, without actually fixing the guilt upon her, supposing the murder to have taken place on the second of February; but he never gave them an inkling of the truth that it was not actually committed until two days later.

He had worked them up to a pitch of expectation, and had convinced them all—Sir Philip excepted—that Mrs. Vance was the criminal. He had even dispelled Sir Philip's uneasiness by his own pretence of belief in the woman's guilt.

Then, when he had got all his *mise en scène* into order, so to speak, then, and only then he had sprung upon them this extraordinary and hitherto unsuspected piece of intelligence.

How Fricker had come by it himself must here be explained. It, of course, resulted from his visit to Chalfont.

Fricker had read over every bit of the evidence at the inquest to his medical friend. He was going over it for the second time, and at one portion of it Chalfont made a peculiar remark: it was made in reference to the statements of a seemingly unimportant witness, Mrs. Mulvany, the Irishwoman who had performed the last sad offices upon Sir Richard's body.

Fricker cited her as one of the reliable witnesses who had testified to the absence of marks on the body.

"Reliable? You call her reliable, do you?" said Chalfont. "I don't. She has made an assertion which is impossible if the man were dead at all!"

"What do you mean?" asked Fricker.

"She said she tried to straighten the joints of the fingers and of one arm, and that she could not, as they always went back to their former position. Now, that is never the case with a dead body. However great the rigidity, however great the force required to straighten the limbs of a corpse, they will remain straight. If what Mrs. Mulvany said were true, then it was only apparent death."

"What?"

"Apparent death—a lethargic trance, if you like the name better. It is common enough."

"Chalfont, you don't think he could have been alive, do you?"

"No; I don't. Why, he would have recovered if that had been the case. He wasn't buried for—how long? Over a week, wasn't it. He would have recovered in a day or two. I think you needn't call Mrs. Mulvany reliable any more."

"How soon do you say he would have recovered if—if—he weren't dead?"

"A trance usually lasts less than twenty-four hours."

"No longer?"

"It might last double or even treble that time."

"Till the Wednesday evening, for instance," said Fricker, musingly.

"By Jove! Fricker, it's not an unlikely explanation of the state in which the body was found by Thomas!"

"It is the explanation. I am sure of it!" cried the detective. "He was in a trance, and he recovered consciousness on that Wednesday evening, and then, the marks! Why, he must have been murdered after that, and—and—oh! Chalfont, I see it all now!"

Fricker had become melo-dramatic, semi-hysterical almost. It was the greatest professional joy he had ever known.

No painter contemplating the finished work of his own genuis; no musician hearing his own masterpiece could feel more exultation than did the detective on finding the real clue to this maze in which he had been wandering and groping for weeks. He saw his way out of it at last.

He spent hours with Chalfont carefully examining every step of the way, half-fearing that after all he might have made a mistake. But no, there was not any mistake at all. He reached the end of the maze, and everything was as clear as day.

What Dr. Parr and all the household had taken for death was only apparent death, a state not unusual in a person suffering from cardiac weakness, and which is generally brought about by a shock. Sir Richard's heart had undoubtedly been in a weak condition, and Mrs. Vance's information about Philip Ravendale's illegitimacy was shock enough to produce this state of trance, a condition in which a person might remain for two or even three days without manifesting any sign of life.

For two whole days after the supposed death of Sir Richard there had been nothing noticed about the body to call for any attention. The master of Ravendale lay calm and peaceful, wrapped in white cerements, to all intents and purposes dead, and so he had remained for two whole days, until the Wednesday evening, that is to say, the evening about which Thomas the butler had so much to tell, and would have told more but for the blundering idiot—the Coroner. What the old servant of the family had supposed to be the work of a dog was nothing less than the work of a murderer.

Roughly speaking, some forty-eight hours had elapsed since the commencement of the trance before the spark of life had been revived in the man taken for dead, and that weak flickering life was the life that had been crushed out by human villainy. The body which Thomas saw was dead indeed, but it had only been so for an hour or so, instead of for two days as he and everyone, except the murderer, supposed.

And here the intinct of the dog becomes at once apparent—an instinct stronger far than the vaunted wisdom of human beings. During these two days the dog had made no lament for the hand that had caressed or the voice that had called. The life was still there and the animal knew it by instinct. But not long after the dastardly deed was wrought, Prince was found howling dismally by his master's body, showing how strong is the instinct of a dumb animal for death.

Remembering how the Coroner had cut short Thomas's evidence, Fricker thought it worth his while to go and question the man further upon what he had found in the library on the Wednesday evening. He had not much doubt when he took leave of Chalfont as to who was the murderer, this new aspect of the case opening up new possibilities, and his conversation with Thomas had changed possibilities to certainties.

"More like a devil than a man," was the graphic description Thomas gave of Sir Philip on the evening in question. Truly it was a devil's work this crushing out of that feeble spark of life.

Fricker had told his chief that he could lay his finger on the murderer, and yet to bring home that murderer's guilt was not so easy.

"There's only one way to prove it," Fricker had reasoned with himself, "and that way is to get him to confess."

But how? By confronting him with the discovery of his crime? He would brazen it out; and the difficulty of fixing it on him by circumstantial evidence would be great. He was a felon in the eyes of the law, it would be easy enough to prove that, but the punishment for the lesser crime would not cover the greater.

There was only one plan of action that commended itself to Fricker, and that was to spring a surprise on the man when he least expected it and was off guard, and so might be led into self-betrayal. This was exactly what Fricker did. He first of all set him at his ease, and then made that tremendous coup.

"The murder took place on Wednesday the fourth of February!"

He spoke slowly and distinctly, and looked straight at his man. The surprise was too great, Philip lost control of himself, he became of a deadly pallor, and half rose from his seat. Seeing the detective's eyes fixed upon him, he sat down again, and his hand crept to his left breast pocket.

"No, you don't!" Fricker cried, catching the full significance of the action, and springing at him whilst Smith came to the rescue. "You don't escape us so easy as that. Its time you were dead, yes, but you shan't die so easily as by a pistol-shot."

"Trapped!" he hissed, between his clenched teeth as a couple of police who had been in readiness outside slipped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Yes, trapped in the nets you have woven for yourself, Philip Rivers! I give you your mother's name, since you have no right to that of Ravendale. Your game is up."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONFESSION.

"'An open confession is good for the soul,' they say. Bah! what do I care about the good of my soul? Not the certainty of redeeming it from its blackness; not the desire to expiate in some measure the sins of a lifetime by aiding justice to wreak her vengeance on me, the guilty, whilst rewarding the innocent for what they have suffered through my wrong-doing; not all the hosts of heaven, earth and hell—nothing could have drawn from me, this confession, which I am about to make, had it not been for her, for whose sweet sake I would fain escape even now from the gulf of sin into which I have fallen.

"It is too late; I cannot escape, but I can and will do what she asks of me—the only thing she has ever asked. To-day, this angel of purity and goodness came to me, the devil of iniquity, and begged of me to confess, that so the 'innocent may be fully justified.'

"Innocence! justice! They are mere names to me. I care not for this or any other reason, she herself is all the reason that can guide me now, for I love her, and will do whatsoever she asks. Yes, that is my secret—I love Norah Blake. Is my love a dishonour to her? Perhaps, and yet it is that dishonour

which forces me to the one honourable action that is left me to do—to confess. If she can pardon the love I bear her, then the judgment men or angels may pass upon my presumption is nothing to me. Now, when the walls of my prison have shut me out for ever from her sight, I write this as an ode to her memory—my confession.

"I will pass over my early youth, not because it was sinless—it was full of sin, and yet white compared with the black iniquity of my later life—but because so long as I believed myself to be what I was called, Philip Ravendale, I had not stooped to crime, and this is a confession of crime—not of mere sin. No man could confess his sins in the term of his natural life; sin is crowded into a life more closely than thought itself.

"On the day I first set eyes on Mary Ann Read I first became a criminal. From her I learnt the story of my birth, of the connection between Colonel Richard Ravendale, my father, and Adelaide Rivers, my mother. She bade me go and prove it for myself, as Fricker, the detective, has since proved it; but I did not need further proof, I knew too well it was true, by the conviction with which all truth is borne in on the human mind.

"'Why—why did you tell me this? Why did you not leave me in happy ignorance?' I asked in the first blinding horror of what it meant.

"'Why did I tell you?' she asked, with a mocking laugh that I hear every time I see her or let my thoughts dwell on her. 'Why did I tell you? To see if you wanted it told to others or not!'

"Then I knew what she meant—blackmail. Then I knew that this woman had swooped down upon me, like a bird of prey, and that she stood there waiting for my self-respect to draw its last breath, as the vulture waits for the last breath to go from its human prey, that she might grip me in her talons, and fix her beak into my very life. If I succumbed and gave her her way, what then?

"I was the heir to the Ravendale estate. I knew my half-brother Richard, who was ten years my senior, would never marry; he had told me so himself, and he was a man whose yea meant yea, and whose nay meant nay. I had lately come in to a considerable sum of money by the death of my father, twenty thousand pounds in fact, and I was then enjoying it, according to my lights. If I gave in to this woman's criminal suggestion to keep the secret of my birth, I might keep my money, and I might still look forward to being the possessor of the Ravendale wealth, a little subtraction being made, of course, in both cases to ensure this woman's silence. If, on the other hand, I bade her begone with her vile attempt to lead me into the crime of fraud, what would be the consequence?

"She would tell the story to the world, perhaps in time receiving remuneration from the next heir for the honesty that gave him his rights. I would no longer be the heir of Ravendale, and I would be obliged to waive my right in that twenty thousand which had been bequeathed to 'Philip Ravendale,' and not to Philip the nameless, as I now knew myself to be. For the rest of my days there would be only poverty and disgrace for me.

"I had been trained to no profession, and I had no notion of how to earn a livelihood beyond the precarious methods of gambling and betting. The utmost I could expect from Sir Richard would be a small pittance by way of compensation for having been given my being by his father, and even that pittance was doubtful, Sir Richard not being of a generous disposition, and the kind of man who pays his debts but never goes beyond the letter of the law in his gifts. I looked the two alternatives in the face, and I decided that this she-vulture's talons would be the least of the two impending evils. I would be her prey, but still the heir of Ravendale.

"One must give the devil his due, and I will say this for Mrs. Read that she did not demand an exorbitant sum for her fidelity. A hundred a year was what she asked of me, and it was certainly not too much to pay for easy circumstances in the present and the prospect of a title and an estate in the future. Why, there are scores of men and women of the *nouveau riche* type who would willingly pay a hundred times a hundred a year for a title alone, but who, in this conservative England, with its not quite extinct respect for the aristocrat, are obliged to content themselves with that modern sham, a double-barrelled name.

"No, Mrs. Reid was moderate in her charges, and she was not a troublesome creditor. Often I have kept her for two years lying out of her money. I always managed to pay up in the end, and she knew that, in one way, I was as safe as the Bank of England. I paid when I had the money, and when I hadn't I set about trying to get some; for in due time my twenty thousand had dwindled down to less than nothing, and I was obliged to live the best way I could by gambling, betting, or begging from Sir Richard.

"At length this last source of income failed me altogether, Richard's patience was worn out; besides, he had heard some ugly particulars of the life I was leading in London, which did not please him with his notions of family honour and his creed of *noblesse oblige*. He behaved well enough; he paid off all my creditors—for the last time—he took care to inform them; he gave me a few hundreds to go on with and closed the doors of Ravendale against me. The few hundreds went the way of my previous thousands and ruin stared me in the face. I could not get credit, my brother's word being more powerful than mine; besides, I had been through the bankruptcy court. I attempted, to no purpose, to raise post-obits on Sir Richard's life. He had nothing particular the matter with him, the slight weakness of the heart not being likely to develop any serious consequences; he was good for another twenty years at least.

"As a last resource I went to Monte Carlo to see if, in the fresh fields and pastures new of that gay little Southern town, I might recoup my fallen fortunes. I had the proverbial luck of beginners. I won—won steadily every night for weeks till I became a marked figure at the tables. One night I won more steadily and more persistently than usual. I was contemplating my pile of Napoleons with much satisfaction when I heard a voice at my elbow beseeching me to place a five-franc piece. 'It is my last!' said the voice, pleadingly—a woman's voice. I looked round and saw Zais. Her beauty dazzled me, though I was never for a moment in doubt as to what type of woman it belonged.

"We understood each other at once—Zais and I. I was fascinated by her beauty and she by the amount I had won at the green cloth. Long after all the pile was spent the spell of that marvellous beauty remained strong upon me. I was her slave for two years, and the end of this half-voluntary slavery only came when I realised that it had made me her slave in another sense—she had learned my secret. It was the old story of Samson and Delilah. She cast the spell of her beauty around me and wormed it from me, and from that moment I grew to hate her. She too exacted her blackmail.

"She did not demand money, I had none to give, and she obtained high salaries as a wire-walker; but she demanded that I should remain unmarried, so that when the Ravendale estate should be mine she might call herself my lady.

"I did not at first read how deep were her designs, and not till long after. All I knew was that she obliged me to put up with her tempers and her insults, and with the other men who were ready to sell their souls to the lovely mistress of Lotos Villa, and who supplied her with diamonds, and with the thousand and one luxuries which her salary was not big enough to buy.

"I had to look on tamely, and, in return, she paid my bills, and gave me the money for my other gaoler, Mrs. Read. I never suspected her ultimate design was marriage till it came to the question of marrying another.

"Sir Richard, though he had closed the doors of Ravendale Hall against me, had not forgotten me, and when he had the chance of putting a good thing my way, at no cost to himself, he did it. Family pride had something to do with it, I daresay. I was his heir, and he wished to see me settle down into a respectable member of society before he should turn his toes to the daisies, and he thought marriage would be the surest way to bring about such a seemingly impossible metamorphosis.

"He knew that Miss Blake's fortune would be sufficient incentive to me to fall in with his wishes. He wrote to ask me to return to the home of my fathers, stating plainly what object he had in view.

"I told Zais just so much of the contents of this letter as was prudent. I did not mention the heiress at Ravendale, nor did she question the cause of Sir Richard's sudden friendliness. Sooth to say, she wanted to get rid of me for a time, that she might be free to wheedle an American millionaire—old Nobbs—out of some of his superfluous dollars.

"I went to Ravendale Hall in August, and I saw Norah Blake, and from the first moment I set eyes on her I forgot that, besides her beauty and simple charm, she had a fortune. It were all one to me had she been a beggar-girl, I loved her—yes, loved her. Through all the defiled atmosphere of my being that one flame leaped to life, and burned as pure as a light before some blessed shrine. I forgot everything in this new joy, and for awhile I was almost happy in the consciousness that I, even I, was permitted to see what heaven might be.

"The one thing that warped my happiness was the knowledge that my flame could never be returned. I came to know of the part Arthur Wyndham played in her life, and I hated him, and it was at my instigation that Sir Richard dismissed him from his position as tutor to George Blake, and forbade Norah to hold any sort of communication with him. But though debarred from all intercourse with the young man, I knew that the girl's heart was still faithful to him, and I hated him the more, and was the more determined to win her for myself, although I knew too well how great a sacrilege that would be. Love is relentless, and whatever scruples I may have felt, I did not let them stand in my way.

"I saw that my attentions made the girl unhappy, and my love had the additional impulse of wounded vanity. And then, by a hand whose very touch would be pollution to Norah Blake in her sweet purity, she was delivered from the fate which threatened her. Zais heard of the true reason of my visit to Ravendale Hall, and she exercised her power over me in a way that hitherto I had not dreamt of. She dared me to marry any woman, and she would tell what she knew. It was enough.

"I was obliged to renounce Norah Blake for ever. I knew that my cause with Richard would be irretrievably lost if it came to his knowledge that I had been the one to draw back from the marriage he had arranged for me, so I appealed to Norah Blake's generosity, and asked her to allow me to represent to my brother that she was obdurate, and would not listen to my suit.

"She was so grateful to me for setting her free from my hated attentions, that she said she would help me by every means in her power. She would marry Arthur Wyndham at once, and Sir Richard should never know that I had voluntarily thrown up the game. This plan of hers would secure my continuance in Sir Richard's good graces; but it also secured for Arthur Wyndham my deadliest hate.

"I left Ravendale Hall the next day, telling Richard that the only way to force his ward to conform to his plan of marrying her to me was to pique her by leaving her for awhile. Richard commended me for my wisdom, and never suspected the true state of the case. Meantime, for two years and more, Mrs. Read had received from me not one single farthing; some money which Zais had given me for her I had spent in other ways, thinking that the woman might very well wait, and not believing that she would ever betray me. She had been faithful to me for nearly twenty years.

"She was beginning to get somewhat unmanageable with her perpetual threats when first the question of my marriage with the heiress was mooted. I went to her and told her of it, and on the strength of it asked for further time. She gave me six months, and then, she declared, if I did not square up, I must take the consequences. I knew that she did not altogether believe in my assertion that the marriage would certainly take place, and I knew that she pitched her tent in Chorlton that she might keep an eye on me, and make sure that my story was not an excuse for delay in paying her; but I did not know that she had placed her daughter in the house to be a spy upon my actions, and to report progress to her.

"I had never seen the girl, and that I was an object of interest to the under-housemaid at Ravendale was consequently unknown to me. When I gave up my suit with Norah Blake the six months' reprieve Mrs. Read had given me was nearly at an end, but that she would not prolong it I did not imagine. She had written to me and told me to what straits she was reduced; but she had often done so before, and I knew she was given to exaggeration.

"I meant to pay her—some day soon—when Norah Blake was married to the penniless tutor, and Sir Richard should give me some compensation for my loss of her and her money. I did not reckon on the worm turning before I had had time to make it harmless.

"On Monday, the second of February, when I went home to my club, after a gay little supper at Lotos Villa, I found a telegram awaiting me, announcing my brother's sudden death. Could anything have happened better? I hurried away to Ravendale Hall the next morning—I, the master of Ravendale, and a baronet—ha, ha! On Wednesday I had a letter from Mrs. Read, warning me that my tenure of the good things that had fallen to my share rested with her. I took the hint; and having business in Chorlton that day, I went to her, and gave her a cheque for twenty pounds.

"She told me of her visit to Ravendale Hall, and told me that it was to what she had on that occasion told Sir Richard that his death was indirectly due. The shock of finding I was a bastard had been too much for him. For obvious reasons Mrs. Read and I agreed that this visit had best be kept secret. My future was now assured anyhow, and she—she was to be trusted if I would increase the blackmail to two hundred a year.

"I went home satisfied that my secret was safe, and then—how shall I tell of what occurred? I was in the library where he lay, dressed as for burial. I had lighted a reading lamp, that I might look over some papers; I knew I should be undisturbed there in that room, and, for myself, I had none of that superstitious terror which attaches to a dead body. I might have been there half-an-hour, when I heard a sound, half-sigh, half-moan, and a slight rustling; and looking round, I saw it move—the thing I thought dead. I grew cold all over, and I felt the great drops of icy dew standing out on my forehead.

"I could not move nor utter a cry. I couldonly stand there and gaze and gaze as I saw the arm creep out from the white wrappings and make feeble passes in the air, groping for something tangible that might recall a sense of life and whereabouts. The head moved, raised itself a little, and there was a clink of a coin dropping to the floor—one of the pennies that had been laid on the eyelids to keep those eyes closed, those eyes that were blinking in the half light, cast by the shaded reading-lamp. I see them yet, those terrible eyes that fixed themselves on me, and seemed to look right through to my heart. I hear it yet, that feeble voice, at first inarticulate from weakness, but murmuring something that I knew was about me, and ending up with that one dread word, whose meaning had brought the proud master of Ravendale near to the gates of death, whose meaning was for me ruin—the word 'bastard.'

"It was enough. The whole of my position rushed upon me—disinheritance of name and wealth, the touch of which had already made my fingers tingle with the delight of possession—disgrace, imprisonment, for was I not a felon in the eyes of the law? What a difference between that and the life that might have been mine, had only those horrible eyes remained sealed under the pennies, had only the voice that had uttered that word remained silent for ever! All the plotting of years undone! All my aims and desires baffled, and by what? By that feeble life struggling to resume its sway, hanging by a mere thread. Nothing more but that between me and my desires—nothing more. How easy to snap the thread, to blow out the feeble flame! And none would know, none could know, for the man was deemed dead by all but me, who stood face to face with him and heard him speak the word 'bastard.'

"Never should he speak it again—never! I crept towards him. He watched me coming. Did he think I came to his aid, to help to bring him back to life? I stood beside him, and looked down at him in his weakness,—I, the nameless felon, and he the master of Ravendale whom all the world thought dead. With one hand I gripped at his throat, with the other I took out my handkerchief and crushed it in his mouth, though I knew he was too feeble to cry out. There was a momentary struggle of the limbs, becoming feebler and feebler, till it was a mere convulsive twitch—a stifled rattle in the throat, and that was all. Those horrible eyes were still staring at me with fearful intensity, but they were sightless. He was dead now in earnest, and I was the master of Ravendale; but I forgot that, I forgot everything but the gaze of those dead eyes. I rushed from the room to escape it, without waiting to blot out the traces of my deed. Why should I? All the world thought he had been dead two days from heart-disease. All the world but me, who had heard him speak the word 'bastard,' and had killed him for it.

"The rest is soon told. I banished the thought of my crime. The deed was done, and of what use to dwell upon it? Fricker, the detective, forced the recollection of it upon me when he dressed up the dead body, and raised it on the bier, as if to mock me when I looked in at the half-closed door. I thought murder would never be suspected. It was suspected; but I, the murderer, was the last person upon whom suspicion fell. I had been in London on the second of February, the day Sir Richard was supposed to have met his death.

"The man to whom suspicion pointed out at the very first was my enemy. He had robbed me of the only love I had ever cared to win, the one pure influence that had come into my life. Partly to satisfy my own hatred, partly to secure my own safety, I aided in fastening the appearance of guilt upon Arthur Wyndham. But another danger threatened. Priscilla Vance, alias Read, had taken it into her head to disappear in a mysterious manner, and a search was on foot for her and for the woman who knew my secret.

"I knew that if she and Mrs. Read were found the fact of her visit to Richard would come out, and that suspicion would be immediately directed to her—suspicion of the strongest. Then her one chance of safety would lie in telling exactly what passed between herself and Sir Richard at her interview with him, and, of course, she would take that chance, and all my story would be known, and that Wednesday night's work would be rendered futile. I alone knew of Mrs. Read's whereabouts, but it was hardly likely she would long elude the vigilance of the police. What was to be done? I applied to Zais for advice.

"'This woman is undoubtedly the murderer of my brother,' I said to Zais, 'but for my own sake I must shield her. But there may come a day when I cannot shield her, and she will betray me.'

"'Baffle her,' said Zais, who was as much interested as I myself in my retention of my title and estate. 'Baffle her? But how?'

"'Alter the entry in the marriage-register. Put it a year earlier, and you are safe.'

"The plan seemed feasible, and I resolved to act upon it; then I might defy Mrs. Read. If her visit to Ravendale on the Monday were discovered she would be arrested, or threatened with arrest, and she would denounce me as a felon. Let her; her story would be disproved, and would but serve to tighten the rope round her own neck."

"I married Zais, not only that we might have an excuse for going out of town for a few days, but because she insisted upon my doing so, as the condition upon which she would help me to carry out the plan she had devised. Moreover, I saw that, as my wife, she would be safe; she had said that so sure as I should call myself Sir Philip Ravendale, she would be Lady Ravendale. Very well, I thought, she shall call herself Lady Ravendale, and she shall help to guard the title for her own sake. I married her, and we went away on our honeymoon, to Paris, as the papers said, to Mereham, as Mr. Fricker so cleverly found out. He found out a little more—what we did there; how I managed to change the date of the entry in the marriage-register whilst Zais, Lady Ravendale, was fainting at the foot of a tombstone, and clinging to that fool of a sacristan, who mistook the pale paint on her face for the pallor of illness, and thought me kind for offering to see her home.

"A couple of days after our return to town, Mrs. Read had the goodness to inform me that she had been obliged to part with the secret she had kept for so long. I laughed in my sleeve; she was too late. Of course the police had gone off on a wild-goose chase to Mereham, I thought. But Fricker was too deucedly clever, and put two and two together as neatly as if I had been there to tell him how to do it.

"He knew me for a felon and an impostor, but how he discovered that I was a murderer too passes my understanding. He is certainly clever—another devil to whom I must give his due. It is to him that the country is indebted for being obliged to pay for my board and lodging at present; it is to him that the hangman will be indebted for ten pounds.

"But it is to sweet Norah Blake that the world at large, and those who have been accused of the crimes I have committed, are indebted for this confession of Philip the nameless, Philip the felon, Philip the murderer!"

CHAPTER XIX

A GOLDEN WAKING.

"You're just in time, Arthur. I was going in to look for you. Come and sit down: I want to talk to you."

Arthur Wyndham stooped and kissed the sweet face that looked up at him with such a wealth of love shining in the clear grey eyes.

Norah was sitting under the shade of a great spreading beech that was already showing in many a golden leaf the signs of approaching autumn.

Beyond the shadow of its branches everything was bathed in the golden light of the afternoon sun.

The air was balmy and delicious, and the

light breezes wafted hither and thither the scent of the flowers that still bloomed in profusion in the flower-beds skirting the well-kept lawn.

Norah wore a dress of some soft white woollen stuff and a rustic straw hat, a couple of blush roses, which she had pinned at her waist, forming a bright bit of colour, and matching the pretty flush that rose to her cheeks when she saw her husband approach. For they were man and wife, these two who had suffered so much through that very love that had knit their hearts together, and that shone now in Norah's eyes.

Arthur's face, too, was alight with gladness; but Norah was so much engrossed with the subject of her own thoughts that she failed to observe that he had come to her with good news of some sort, and that he held something behind his back.

She had news, and, manlike, he let his wait. He sat down facing her, and still kept his hands hidden.

"Well, dear?" he said.

"Arthur, I have been thinking for the last hour—it isn't the first time I have thought of it—I have been thinking that——" she paused.

"What?"

"That I wish all this had not come to me," with a sweep of her arm—"the place, I mean, and the money. You see it is like the price of a life. If he had not been so rich he would have been alive to-day most likely. Every penny I touch over and above what is my own seems to me somehow to have the image of his dead face stamped upon it. Every time I pass that room," she shuddered slightly, "I picture to myself that awful scene just as Philip described it. I wish—oh, I wish I had not been the next-of-kin!"

"If you do not like to live at Ravendale, dear, and it has no pleasant associations for either of us, why not let the place, and live elsewhere," replied Arthur.

"Let it? Who would take it? Even the very servants have a horror of it. I wish—I wish I could give it away. It might do for some charitable institution. Oh, Arthur, I'd just like to get rid of it all, money and all. Could I?"

She spoke hurriedly and almost shyly, as if she was ashamed of this somewhat childish dislike to the gold that seemed to her blood-stained.

Arthur's face looked radiantly happy at the suggestion, but in a moment it became grave again.

"I, too, wish with all my heart you could be rid of it all, Norah; but the estate is entailed, you know."

"Once—I don't know much about these things—but once I overheard Sir Richard talking to Mr. Manvers about Philip, and he said he wished the estate had not been entailed that he might choose his own heir. I did not understand it at the time, but Mr. Manvers told him the entail could be cut off in the next generation. Now, I wonder, could I do it?"

"I believe you could. You belong to a later generation."

"Then I will, and I will give all this blood-stained wealth to the poor, and make them my heirs. This will redeem it from the curse that must rest upon it. You—you will not mind, Arthur?"

"I? Heaven knows, my darling, how often I have wished you had not inherited Ravendale. I couldn't help feeling it was like a barrier between us somehow."

"Why did you not tell me this, Arthur? Your thoughts and wishes were surely mine."

"How could I, a beggar, ask you to give up your wealth when I had none to offer you in return? I would never have asked it, Norah; but now that it has come from yourself, I tell you honestly I am thankful."

"We shall not be poor by any means. You know, dear," pursued Norah, eagerly, "there is still my own money that my father left me, and Mr. Manvers said that would bring in about eight hundred a year, we can live very comfortably on that."

"And on this," and Arthur held up to his wife's astonished eyes three books all precisely similar as to binding and outward appearance, except that one was marked Vol. I., another Vol. II., and the third Vol. III.

"Arthur! Your novel!" she cried, when she realized that the cover bore her husband's name. "You never told me!" she said, in a tone of reproach.

"That I had sold it?" he answered. "No, my darling, I wanted to surprise you. I wanted to keep the surprise as a kind of wedding present—all I could give you, except myself," he laughed. "I had hoped it would have been ready before our marriage, but there was some delay in getting it out. Yes, it is my novel at last. I wrote the greater part of it in those terrible days when the world looked upon me as a criminal, and I could scarcely have endured those days of trouble, but for the occupation and distraction it afforded me. I thought I had not a friend, but you and my mother, and the very irony of such a fate made me create friends in the realm of fancy. They are not quite such ethereal friends either; in fact, they threaten to become substantial," he finished with a laugh.

"You mean they have brought you in money?"

"Not yet, but I think they will. Here is a letter from my publisher—his son was my greatest chum at Oxford—in which he speaks enthusiastically of the book, and expects it to prove the book of the year. He also makes me an offer of two hundred pounds for a magazine story to be ready within three months."

"Arthur! My husband! I am so glad, for I know how you have longed to make a name for yourself in the world. Your novel! Ours! for what is yours is mine you know. Our very own!" and she caressed the volumes with their smooth bindings of black with red letterings. "'A Dream of Darkness,' by Arthur P. Wyndham. 'A Dream of Darkness!' Arthur. I don't like the title. It is gloomy."

"My life was gloomy when I wrote it. My next will have a different title."

"You have christened it already, when it is not even written?" she said.

"It is written, my love, my queen, not on paper, but on my heart, and it is called, 'A Golden Waking.'"

* * * * *

A few words will suffice to tell how certain other of the persons connected with the Ravendale Mystery fared. After all the doubts surrounding it were set at rest, Zais had a golden waking, in a literal sense, to her dream of being my lady, and playing the English baronet's wife. Her connection with the most celebrated criminal case that had been brought before the public for many years, had the result of raising her salary to a hundred a week. Of course, her list of admirers was lengthened, and her performances on the high wire drew greater crowds than ever. She left Lotos Villa for a far more magnificent establishment in the same neighbourhood, the setting up of which made a considerable drain on old Nobb's banking account. When Philip Rivers was in prison awaiting his execution, she wrote him a little note in which she thanked him for the splendid advertisement he had given her; the warders mercifully withheld this evidence of the woman's utter heartlessness from the condemned man.

Mrs. Read, alias Vance, received her fifty pounds from Fricker, and Norah, whose husband she had been the means of freeing from suspicion, gave her a sum big enough to permit of her taking herself off to that land of refuge for all those who find other countries too hot to hold them—America. Being chief informer in the case, she was pardoned for her own share in Philip's imposition. Fricker made an offer to her and Priscilla to become female detectives, but they rejected it indignantly.

Fricker's name became in real life what Lecoq's is in fiction—a household word. He was often heard to confess that the Ravendale case had spoilt him, every other case seeming to him tame and uninteresting when compared with the labyrinth of circumstances that had surrounded and shrouded the RAVENDALE MYSTERY.

[THE END]

A MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED.

(*Continued from page 225.*)

"Be the happiest man in all this wide world then!" she cried, laughing joyously, though the great teardrops were glistening in her velvety eyes, and her pretty lips had taken a very pathetic curve.

"My generous darling!" cried the infatuated young man, a great rapture lighting up his dark eyes, as he drew her within the loving circle of his arms, and thanked her mutely but expressively.

For quite an hour after that satisfactory arrangement there was nothing but the most utter nonsense talked in the pretty room. Artist and model sat very close together on the old sofa in a very dream of happiness; they took no notice of the flight of time, and were utterly amazed when Fay flew in to tell Gladys that dinner was ready.

"Dinner!" ejaculated that young lady, hastily springing up, and vainly trying to smooth her ruffled, bronze brown locks. "Why, Fay, child! we have only just had breakfast! You are making a mistake!"

Jack burst out laughing as he caught Fay's look of utter bewilderment, and saw how she stared at her pretty, blushing cousin. He sprang from his seat on the sofa, and picked the astonished child up in his arms.

"What's the matter wiv Gladyth?" demanded the child, curiously. "I fink she's been asleep again," she added, shrewdly, "she's so stupid!"

"No she hasn't," replied Jack, promptly, laughing gaily as he turned his beaming eyes on Miss Brown's flushed face.

"Well, what makes her forget the time?" asked Fay, severely.

"I'll tell you, Fairy. She's going to marry me, and we've been so busy talking it all over that we forgot to look at the clock."

"Ah!" cried a cheery, pleased voice, just behind them, "is it all settled then? I am so glad!"

"Auntie!" exclaimed Gladys, flying to the little widow, and flinging her arms, round her, "Oh, auntie, I am such a happy girl!"

"And I such a happy man!" chimed in Jack, eagerly, putting Fay down, and striding over to them, a great gladness in his dark eyes as he met Mrs. Brandon's bright glance and clasped her eager hands. "But Gladys darling!" a sudden disurbing thought taking possession of his mind. "I—I have something to tell you. "I—I am very poor—do you mind that, heart's dearest?"

"Not a bit, Jack!" cried the girl, hastily; then with shy audacity, "and I am very poor, dear—do you mind?"

"Not I!" he answered, hastily, taking her hand in his, and bending his handsome head very close to hers.

"We can be very happy even although we are poor," cried the girl with sweet gravity, letting her slender fingers close round his.

"I should think you could!" said Mrs. Brandon with bright decision. "What is money? One can be very contented with but a modest amount of it. But, Gladys, my dear one, I think you should make your confession to Jack; he ought to know what you have done."

"Your confession!" exclaimed the young

man, a little alarmed by the sudden fading of the girl's pretty colour.

"Oh, I must tell you!" cried Gladys in desperate tones. "Jack, dear, I ran away from my guardian's house and took refuge with auntie because he—they—that is Mr. Dane—was bothering me to marry a hateful, rich young man!"

"No!" ejaculated Jack, in astonished tones. "By Jove! how singular! I deserted my home for the very same reason. My father had set his heart on making up a match between me and an heiress, and I distinctly refused to oblige him. He has a fiery temper of his own, and he ordered me to leave the house until I felt inclined to comply with his wishes. The dear old mater is full of sympathy for me, but he is as unyielding as ever, and preserves an obdurate silence."

Glady's face had grown paler still as he spoke; she waited until he had finished, then quietly drew her hands away from his.

"You must go back, Jack," she said sadly, yet firmly. "You ought not to vex your father; and, besides," with a little mournful laugh, "suppose in the after years you regretted the heiress?"

She smiled bravely at him as she uttered her sad little speech, then turned and hid her face on her aunt's shoulder.

"Oh, my darling, what utter nonsense!" cried Jack, in distracted tones, and seizing her hands again. "Please don't talk like that. I hate the heiress! I have never seen her, but I feel sure she is hideously ugly. I wouldn't marry her even if I had never known you!"

"Nor I that hateful young man!" cried Gladys, suddenly yielding. "I've never seen him, but I detest him."

"Your father will never forgive you, I'm afraid," said Gladys, presently, as they all sat talking in the sunny studio, forgetful of the waiting dinner.

"I don't care," cried Jack, recklessly. "I certainly cannot do what he wishes."

"Yes, you can," exclaimed a loud jovial voice at the door, "you young idiot! You are doing it now as fast as possible!"

"Father!" ejaculated the young man, springing up and drawing Gladys with him.

They had been too much interested in their conversation to notice the loud ringing of the door-bell, the discussion which had ensued between Mrs. Brandon's small domestic and the new arrivals, the tread of heavy feet across the little hall, and the gentle opening of the studio door; all these sounds had quite escaped the notice of the happy quartette in Jack's room.

But they were completely aroused now. They saw only too plainly the two middle-aged gentlemen standing just inside the door.

"Mr. Dane," ejaculated Gladys, nervously, and flushing up to the very roots of her hair.

"Yes, child, here I am," replied her guardian, smiling benevolently. "I am very pleased with you, my dear."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, defiantly. "I—I won't marry that young man!"

"Yes, you will; you have just promised to do so," retorted her guardian with a gruff chuckle.

Gladys relapsed into a bewildered silence, and Jack, losing patience, stepped forward to do battle for her.

"Father," he said, firmly, "this young lady, Miss Gladys Brown, is to be my wife."

"Precisely," said his father, beaming at them. "Only mark my words—she is Miss Gladys Pauncefort, the heiress I meant you to marry."

"Ha! ha!" chuckled Mr. Dane. "And he, Gladys," nodding in Jack's direction, "is Mr. John Lorimer, the hateful, rich young man, son of Sir John Lorimer!"

For a minute Jack and Gladys stared at each other in a somewhat wild fashion. Then a few words escaped their lips.

"The ugliest girl in the world!" she said, nodding at him, mischievously.

"A hateful young man!" he retorted, his eyes twinkling.

"Here's a pretty comedy!" laughed Sir John, his jolly red face radiant with smiles. "My wife, when she was here yesterday, knew Gladys at once from a photo she had seen at Mrs. Dane's. She came straight off to me with the glorious news that our two young rebels were living in the same house, and had yielded themselves a prey to Dan Cupid. I hurried off to Dane with the news, brought him off here, and, as you see, arrived just at the right moment."

There was a happy clamour of voices in the little room after that; but at last there came a lull while Jack took the two delighted old men over to see his picture.

"And you won't taste that plum-pudding after all, Jack," cried Fay, suddenly, in despairing tones.

"Yes, he shall, Fairy," said Sir John, lifting her into his arms. "We'll make mother shut up this house, and we'll carry her and you and the pudding down to the Hall for Christmas Day."

"Oh, lovely!" cried the child in ecstatic tones, and throwing her arms round the old man's neck.

"That will be a treat for Fay and me," said Mrs. Brandon softly. "Now you must come and lunch with me, I hear Susan ringing the bell."

"After all, Jack, my boy," laughed Sir John, as he flung open the door and stood in courtly style waiting to take his hostess in, "your marriage has been arranged."

"Yes," retorted Jack, with an adoring glance at Gladys. "You've had your own way, sir; but, as things have turned out, we don't mind being beaten."

"Mind!" echoed Gladys, coolly, and returning Jack's glance with interest. "I should think not! Why, we are positively revelling in our defeat!"

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

FOND MAMMA: "Why don't you play with Willie Winkum any more?" Little Dick: "He plays toss ha'penny." "Bless me! Well, I'm glad my little boy doesn't play with him, then." "I don't any more. He always wins."

THE MODERN WAY: "I like the bonnet very much. It is simply a dream of beauty. But do you think it matches my complexion?" "No, I don't think it does. But that needn't cause any trouble. You can easily fix your complexion to match the bonnet."

"DON'T you think it is too bad that the author should allow the hero to be murdered in the last act?" "Well, yes, my dear; it could have been arranged more satisfactorily. He could have allowed him to die a natural death—say early in the first act."

HAD HIS REASONS.—The reporter had just come in from an assignment in a murder case. It was a rainy day, and he had to cross a ploughed field on foot. "I see," observed the city editor, looking with some displeasure at his large and muddy boots, "you have brought the scene of the murder with you." "Yes," answered the reporter, apologetically, "I've got to have some ground for my story, you know."

COUNSEL (to hostile witness): "Is that your handwriting?" Witness: "No." "Do you swear that it is not?" "Yes." "Does it resemble your handwriting?" "No, sir." "In what way does it differ?" "I can't say, sir." "Now attend to me; you say it is not your handwriting, that it in no way resembles it, and yet you can't tell in what way it differs. How do you reconcile these statements?" "I can't write, sir."

MRS. O'BRIEN: "Good-marain', Mrs. McCabe. An' phwat makes yez look so sad?" Mrs. McCabe: "Shure, Dinnis was sint to th' penitintiary for six months." Mrs. O'Brien: "Well, shure don't worry. Six months will soon pass." Mrs. McCabe: "Shure, that's phwat worries me."

A BIRMINGHAM lady went to the door of her son's sleeping apartment and remarked: "Why, Johnny, aren't you up yet?" "No, ma, I'm so sleepy." "You lazy little scamp! Get up and be ashamed of yourself." "Let me sleep a little longer; I can be ashamed of myself in bed just as well as anywhere else."

THE woman who does not understand a foreign language should give it a wide berth. One who did not observe this rule was a recently married widow who, sending in her new card to a former friend, inscribed beneath the name "née Mrs. James Huntington." To be born a married woman is a destiny not often achieved.

"WILL you tell the jury what the prisoner said to you, Mr. O'Hanlan?" "Yer honor, it was of the jurymin wull stip over forninst me from beyant there. is's with plisure I'll tell him that same." "Come, no nonsense! Tell the jury from where you are what the prisoner said." "And faix, how can I, sor? The wretch only spoke to me wid his boot."

HEARD IN A RAILWAY-STATION.—"There's nothing I hate worse than to put a penny into a weighing-machine, and have the thing fail to work. I've been cheated that way half a dozen times. I call it getting money under false pretences; and what can a person do? You can't demand the cent back of the sphinx-like slot that took it!"

THE modern idea of combination in teaching was well illustrated the other day by a small boy, who was asked what he studied in the public schools. He answered: "Oh, everything—free 'and drawing an' cookin, an' bacteriology, an' music an' spectrum analysis, an' sewin' on buttons, an' agricultural chemistry, an' dish washin', an' everything."

"MY daughter," said the loving father, with perhaps a shade of harshness in his voice, "what does that young man who calls on you every evening in a dress suit do for a living?" "He hasn't determined yet, father," replied the fair girl with a glad look in her eyes, "but he is thinking something of getting a position as life companion to a young lady."

WASH a baby clean and dress him prettily, and he will resist all advances with a most superlative crossness; but let him eat treacle, gingerbread, and play round the coal-box for half an hour, and he will nestle his dear little dirty face close up to your clean shirt-front, and be just the lovingest little rascal in all the world.

A COUNTRYMAN travelling for the first time on one of the London tramways, and wishing to get out, gave a vigorous pull at the bell-strap extending along the centre of the car, and the result was a sharp ring at both bells. "What are you ringing at both ends for?" exclaimed the irritated conductor. "Because I wish the thing to stop at both ends," replied the rustic.

MISS CLARA: "Why, I am surprised, Mr. Featherly, to hear you say that you are passionately fond of horseback riding." Mr. Featherly: "Oh, I am devoted to it! But why are you so surprised, Miss Clara?" Miss Clara: "Oh, for no particular reason, Mr. Featherly. Only I saw you riding in the park this morning, and—and it occurred to me that—you weren't, you know."

HERE is an anecdote related by an Irish comedian of an experience he once had in the Isle of Wight. The place was Ventnor, and the prospects of a good "house" were dark. It occurred to the Hibernian artist to inquire if there was an Irish quarter in the town; so he said to his host, a hotel-keeper, "Have you many Irish here?" "No," was the ingenuous reply, "we are remarkably free from them!"

SOCIETY.

The children of the German court are learning to dance the minuet.

A widow upon being married again does not have any bridesmaids, nor is it quite good form for her to carry a bouquet.

Women physicians will be placed on the staff of the Exposition Hospital at Chicago, and will rank equally with their brother-physicians in all respects.

Only one woman of the upper class of Egypt is permitted to see men. She is the widowed Princess Nazal, for whom the Sultan issued an order granting her that privilege.

Princess Mary and Princess Victoria have had the very narrowest escape of being burnt to death. A candle fell over, something caught fire, and in an instant there was a blaze that resulted in the destruction of much property, but happily not of themselves.

Mr. Edison is confident of his ability to establish a telephone connection with Mercury and Mars, and says he can find out whether the inhabitants of those planets are civilized or savage.

What will probably be the first public Royal visit to Tonbridge since Edward I. was entertained there three days, will be made by the Princess Beatrice, accompanied by her husband on Tuesday, the 28th prox., to open a two days' fete and fancy fair to be held in the grounds of Tonbridge Castle.

The French Government has sent three superb pieces of tapestry to Copenhagen as a golden-wedding present to the King and Queen of Denmark. One piece, which represents Baudry's "Autumn and Winter," is Gobelins; and the others, of which the subjects are landscapes by Francis, were executed at Beauvais.

A woman in Philadelphia is earning her living by supplying families with a certain kind of pudding of which she alone knows the recipe. She has regular orders for the pudding, which she delivers once or twice a week, as the family may desire.

New opera-glass cases have a secret compartment at the bottom of the velvet or plush bag, whose clasp is hidden from all save the owner. In the hidden receptacle are stowed away a powder puff, a comb, a bottle of sal volatile, and two or three hairpins, and the cover of the case is a mirror.

The finest complexions in the world are those of the Spanish and Italian ladies, who live largely on coarse grain food and fruit like the orange or banana. Half a dozen for breakfast, with a cup of coffee, a dozen for lunch, with a glass of milk and a saucer of oatmeal, and a dozen more for supper, with a crust of bread and a sip of tea, may not be high living in the proper sense of the word, but such a course of diet will bring a complexion of peach and ivory which will drive almost any belle off her head with envy.

The Queen invariably travels by a special train, for the running of which great preparations are made a considerable time in advance. Her next movements are usually known some days before she intends to make them, and therefore the companies over whose railway lines she will travel are enabled to make all the necessary arrangements with leisure. Most people know that the best engine available is set aside for the purpose, and the royal saloon is coupled in the centre of a train composed of drawing-room carriages, in which her suite travel. A fast pilot engine steams a short distance ahead of her Majesty to see that the line is clear; and, to further ensure her safety, all goods traffic is suspended until she has reached her destination. The signalmen along the line are advised of her advent by telegraph, and a special printed code of instructions is issued to them the day before, so that they know exactly when to expect her, and hence when to clear the road.

STATISTICS.

The world's population is increasing at the rate of six million per year.

China, with all her 400,000,000 people, has only 40 miles of railroad.

The fountains at the Crystal Palace are capable of throwing up 120,000 gallons of water per minute.

The number of rabbits destroyed in South Wales during the past year is computed at twenty millions.

An eminent authority on entomological and ornithological physiology says that an ordinary house-fly makes 320 strokes with its wings each second; the bumble bee, 240; the honey bee, 19, and the wasp, 110. The sparrow, he says, strikes the air at the rate of 13 strokes per second; the wild duck, eight; the pigeon, eight, and the osprey, six.

GEMS.

Simplicity of character is the natural result of profound thought.

Of all counterfeits there is none more contemptible than counterfeit humility.

It is easier to fall between the rounds of the ladder of fame than to mount it.

Have the courage to show that you respect honesty in whatever guise it appears, and your contempt for dishonest duplicity, by whosoever exhibited.

What others think of us is a less important matter than what others ought to think of us. It is better to be in disfavour with others because we are misunderstood than to be in favour because we are supposed to deserve better than we do. And in the long run the surest way of winning the favour of those whose opinion is worth most is by deserving it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Good Pie Crust.—The secret of making good pies is to use as little water as possible to get the dough into shape.

A Rich Syllabub.—Put a pint and a half of port and half a pint of sherry in a bowl with sugar to taste. Milk the bowl full. Twenty minutes later, add clotted cream, nutmeg or cinnamon, and "hundreds and thousands," or caraway comfits.

Ham Toast.—Slices of toasted bread with the crusts cut off, two eggs, two tablespoonfuls of butter, some cold ham or tongue grated. Put the yolks and whites, well beaten, into a stew-pan with the butter; stir them two minutes over the fire, spread them over the toast, and lay over them a sufficient quantity of cold ham or tongue.

Oatmeal Gems.—One pint of cooked oatmeal, one pint of sweet milk, one-half cup of sugar, two tablespoonfuls of melted butter, two beaten eggs, one teaspoonful of salt, unless the oatmeal is salted already, then use less; two teaspoonfuls of baking powder in flour enough to make a stiff batter. Bake in hot gem pans in a quick oven.

The remains of almost any fish are suitable to warm *au gratin*. Cut it up, sprinkle the bottom of a shallow fireproof dish with a mixture of chopped herbs, parsley, chives, chervil, salt, pepper, some grated nutmeg, and small dice of butter. Make a thick, tidy layer of fish, cover it with bread raspings; over this pour a little hot butter and half a tumblerful of light white wine or stock. Bake in a fairly hot oven with hot embers over the lid. Squeeze the juice of a lemon over the gratin, and serve as it is with a garniture of sliced lemon and parsley.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Wax candles were first used in the twelfth century.

The Welsh people formerly believed that bees came from from Paradise.

Fewer suicides occur in Ireland than in any other country of Europe.

Dried sunflower blossoms are eaten by the poorer natives of Bombay and Bengal.

It is said that in all the forests of the earth there are no two leaves exactly the same. It is also said that amid all peoples of the earth there are no two faces precisely alike.

In this age of utilization of every material, it is scarcely surprising to find that raw silk is being used largely for bath towels. Such towels are soft and elastic, and by producing an electric friction, bring the blood into brisk circulation.

No fish can equal the dolphin as a swimmer. It has been observed to dart through the water at a rate computed to be much greater than twenty miles an hour, and is often seen swiming round and round a vessel which is sailing at highest speed.

A curious book, in which the text is neither written nor printed, but woven, has lately been published at Lyons. It is made of silk, and was published in 25 parts. Each part consists of two leaves, so that the entire volume only contains 50 leaves, inscribed with the service of the Mass and several prayers. Both the letters and the border are in black silk on a white background.

"The piece of silver," mentioned in the Bible as the kind of coin in which the reward of Judas's treachery was paid was about sixty-six and two-thirds cents. Judas therefore received a sum about equal to twenty dollars of our money. It is calculated by political economists that the difference of value between the money of that and of this day would make that amount about equal to two hundred dollars at the present time, which is a small compensation for everlasting infamy.

A curious illustration of the domestic economy of the Egyptians has been met with in the unwinding of the bandages of the mummies. Although whole webs of fine cloth have been most frequently used, in other cases the bandages are fragmentary, and have seams, darns, and patches. Old napkins are used, old shirts, pieces of something that may have been a shirt, and a piece of cloth was found with an arm-hole in it, with a seam gusset and band finely stitched by fingers themselves long since crumbled and their dust blown to the four winds.

Here is an interesting item regarding the Empress Eugénie. In her day she was the leader of fashion, and her pin money for dress was fabulous. Her foot and hand were so small that her maids, who had her shoes and gloves as perquisites, could find no market for them, so they were presented by the empress yearly to the orphans of the Eugénie-Napoleon Asylum, where fifty fatherless and motherless girls were educated at her cost. All the white shoes and white gloves which those girls wore at their first communion were those which had been worn by the empress.

It is unfortunate that stout people almost always have a liking for foods that make fat, while thin people dislike them. If these individuals would exercise a little strength of will, and take in great moderation certain foods, their figures would after a few months be quite different. The foods of which corpulent persons ought to beware and which thin people ought to take are potatoes, starchy foods, sweets, cream, milk, thick soups, and sauces, cocoa, chocolate, peas, parsnips, carrots beets. The foods which stout people may have with safety are lean meat, poultry, game, eggs in all forms, flat fish, green vegetables, succulent fruits, tea and coffee.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MIDGE.—It will be leap-year in 1896 and in 1904.

TIM.—You are bound by your agreement.

TEMPLAR.—You are still liable for the balance.

LONGSHANKS.—The first election by ballot was at Pontefract, on August 15, 1872.

S. F. D.—You must not detain a workman's tools as security for debt.

A HEREFORD LASS.—Herefordshire wills are proved at the district registry office, Hereford.

C. C.—Cannock Chase MACCOTYRES began August 18, 1873.

DOT.—The population of London, within the Registrar-General's tables of mortality, is 4,211,056.

T. M.—The railway was completed from Birmingham to London and opened in September, 1838.

JACOB.—Müller was hanged for the murder of Mr. Briggs, November 14, 1864.

VIOLET.—Probably you refer to the planet "Venus," which has been a very brilliant star lately.

LULU.—Moles have eyes, but they are very small. Their senses of hearing and smell are very sharp.

GYP.—The Tichborne claimant was convicted and sentenced February 28, 1874

A. W.—A man who wishes to be a warder in one of Her Majesty's prisons must be 5 ft. 9 in. in height.

PLODDER.—The mandolin is tuned the same as a violin. E, A, D, and G are the four tones.

H S.—You had better first write to one of the papers connected with the services, and then you can obtain news of your son by writing to his commanding officer.

ANXIOUS J. H. R.—Unless you come to an amicable arrangement with your landlord he can stop the furniture being taken out of the house.

BLUNDERER.—The soldering of tin is such a common every-day affair, that if you are not familiar with the process we fear we could not make you understand.

DOROTHY.—The best way to keep your hands soft and white is to wear gloves as much as possible, even at night.

JENNIE.—Gilded picture-frames may be cleaned of dust and fly-blow with a sponge damped with warm spirits of wine.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—We don't know the company. Never heard of it before, and cannot find any trace of it among the list of recognised English companies.

MACDUFF.—There is no presumptive heir to the dukedom of Fife in the meantime. Should the present Duke not be survived by male issue the title will lapse.

VICTOR.—1. Height for Foot Guards, 18 to 20 years, 5 feet 7 inches; over that age, 5 feet 8 inches. 2. For 26th and all ordinary line regiments 5 feet 4 inches.

AILEEN.—No confidence in either recipe. The application of very warm water, as warm as the skin will bear it, night and morning, will prove more efficacious.

KENNETH.—A convener of committee calls the members together and presides at their meetings, also signs minutes.

LAMBERT.—No idea. The company is a private one, not registered anywhere, so that we are unable even to suggest a probable source of information.

OVERLOOKED.—A damp cloth rubbed in pipe-clay, then "dabbed" on window would give all the obscuration you desire, and be instantly removable.

S. Y.—You have no good claim on the watchmaker. You lose your watch and he loses his work on it, unless you can show that he was negligent in the custody of it.

PENELOPE.—After washing the tick, wring it out of very thick starch, and while it is still damp send it to be mangled.

IGNORANCE.—The best way to teach yourself to write and speak well is to read as much as you can of standard authors' works.

TROUBLE.—If the wife leaves her husband without adequate reason and refuses to return to him, she cannot claim his support.

COY.—There seems to be no reasonable excuse for the apprehensions entertained by the young lady. There is no reason why second cousins may not marry.

LOVEL.—Tow or flax is used to stuff animals. Of course, discs of wood or cork are also inserted to serve as a foundation for the wires that hold the skin in shape and give the animal its natural attitude.

HUGH.—An engagement as clerk or similar occupation where the wages are paid monthly can be terminated by a month's notice from a regular pay-day in absence of agreement or trade custom to the contrary.

INDIGNANT.—A lodger's goods cannot legally be detained except for rent. This would not include disputed charges for "breakages." You may summon the party for illegal detention of your goods.

LA LEURE.—We have not the necessary space in this department to explain the different phases of the moon. As before stated, its motions, to the casual observer, in different seasons of the year, seem very irregular, but almost any work on astronomy will aid you in your pursuit of the desired knowledge.

TOPSY.—Salts of lemon will answer your purpose. It can be had of any chemist, who will also tell you how to use it. We do not tell character from handwriting.

WORRIED.—As a rule quarterly payment of rent implies a yearly tenancy with six months' notice, unless the contrary can be shown by agreement.

UNHAPPY MOTHER.—You are not obliged to provide a home for your son if he is of full age. If he assaults or threatens you summon him before the justices.

DORIS.—The Queen having delegated her prerogative to a Minister, who is responsible to Parliament, cannot grant a reprieve to a criminal whose sentence the Minister has refused to mitigate.

F. L.—The militia reserves are liable to be called upon for foreign service in case of war; but in what regimental order it would be for the War Office to determine.

RUFUS.—It was estimated that there are a quarter of a million of accidental deaths annually in the world. In Europe and the United States there are upwards of 100,000.

T. M.—1. The Dunbars were a Border race, their chief being the Earl of Dunbar and March. 2. The name of the race is taken from the locality, like many others in Scotland. It means hill of strength.

F. S.—The building known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle, in London, which was built for the celebrated Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in 1861, is capable of seating 6,500 persons.

G. S.—If you go to any of the colonies you may get your pension commuted; but if you go to the States or other foreign parts no application is made to Pension Commissioners, Chelsea.

AN ENIGMATIC GIRL.

ONCE on a time there lived a maid,
Who never was of mice afraid;
A perfect game of whist she played,
This maid entrancing.
Of gowns and styles she never talked,
Attempts to compliment she balked,
For exercise she only walked—
She hated dancing.

She wore no loud, queer-coloured gloves,
She never yet had been in love,
Her bureau held no picture of
The latest actor.
And, furthermore, she never went
To matinées, nor ever spent
Her change for soda; roses sent
Could not attract her.

Of slang she never used a word,
Of flirting she had never heard,
Society—it seemed absurd—
She did not care for.
At gay resorts where men were not
She never seemed to care a jot,
Until the mothers wondered what
The girl was there for.

No one will know from whence she came,
She left no record but her fame,
Not even can we learn her name
Or what her station.
When did she live? How did she die?
She lived in fancy. It's a lie.
I've only tried to practise my
Imagination.

J. G. B.

MEG.—Charles Robert Maturin, a native of Dublin, Ireland, was both a curate and an author. He was noted for his eloquence in the pulpit. He wrote several novels and the tragedy of "Bertram."

H. B.—The man is entitled to his wages as long as he is in the ship, and he cannot be sent ashore to an hospital without being first discharged before the British Consul or the port authorities in regular form.

LUCAS.—Lucas is a Roman name, and is very common in Scotland as a surname in the two forms Lucas and M'Lucas. Not aware that the name is prevalent in Ireland.

MISERABLE MINNIE.—You have done a very unwise thing in giving your photograph to the young man if you were not well acquainted with him. Keep your pictures for your intimate friends.

PUPPY.—Peter was the apostle who is said to have been crucified with his head downward at his own request. It is said that he suffered crucifixion about the same time with the Apostle Paul, and in the Neronian persecutions.

H. F. L.—The British resident, Sir Louis Cavignari, and his companions were murdered at the Embassy House, Cabul, September 4, 1879. Sir F. Roberts's famous march was from Cabul to Candahar, August, 1880.

GREGOR.—You can obtain a marriage license at the office of the local superintendent registrar. The marriage may take place after the expiration of one clear day after the entry of the notice. The cost of marriage by license at a register office is in all £2 17s. 1d.

M. A. P.—For cement for meerschaum, take equal parts white of egg and water, beat them well together, sprinkle in as much slaked lime as to make the whole up to a thin paste, apply at once to the parts to be joined, as it sets very quickly.

GRANNIE.—We would like to be of assistance, but cannot give medical advice. The "spring medicine" and "purifying the blood" ideas are all humbug. Children have no more, indeed less, need of medicine in spring than at other seasons; and as for purifying blood, we imagine what they really require is more of it rather than purification.

PEONY.—To get rid of the annoying flush in the face, it is necessary to pay very strict attention to the diet, leave all rich food alone, abstain from greasy meats—indeed, meats are among the principal causes of such troubles. Tonics, liquor, beer and like beverages should never be indulged in, and some mild remedy should be taken to act on the liver.

ROBIN ADAIR.—The match, in its primitive form, was that of Godfrey Hanckwitz, who, in 1680, a few years after the discovery of phosphorus, applied this substance by rubbing it between folds of brown paper until it took fire. It was then made to ignite a stick, one end of which had been dipped in sulphur. The modern lucifer match was invented in 1829, by John Walker, an English chemist.

PRIMROSE.—Viscountess Beaconsfield was born in 1789, Mr. Disraeli in 1805. She was thus not 30 but 15 years older than he, and their marriage, though consummated late in life, was really one of pure sentiment after all, she being the widow of his first colleague. No doubt she was rich, but he had outlived the period when her money could have been an inducement to him.

DISAPPROVAL.—There is no reason why a young lady may not drive a tandem if she pleases. The only objection to so doing is that in case of accident a woman's dress makes it more dangerous for her to handle the horses quickly and carefully. As to the item of strength, every horseman knows that mere muscle is but a small part of the management of a horse. It is more on tact and dexterity that he must rely than on brute force.

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.—The green colour on your kitchen walls will not hurt your eyes except by darkening the apartment and causing you to strain your sight in the effort to see things plainly. Of all colours green is perhaps the last that should be selected for dwelling-house walls, it absorbs so much light, both natural and artificial, that it makes places seem dull, cheerless, and cold.

JANET.—The date of the institution of the curfew bell is doubtful. By many it is believed to have been first appointed by William the Conqueror, who ordained that when it was rung at eight o'clock at night all persons should put out their lights and go to bed, his real design being to prevent secret night assemblages of his enemies, the Saxons, but there seems evidence to show that the curfew was of much earlier date than William's time.

GRATITUDE.—The precise date of the invention of spectacles is not certainly known. To one authority it seems probable that the first hint of their construction and use was taken either from the writings of Alhazen, who lived in the twelfth century, or of Roger Bacon, who died in 1292 or 1294. Another authority ascribes the invention to Salvino Armato D'Armati, of Florence, upon whose tomb the fact was inscribed with the date 1317.

AGATHA.—Rub shoes free from dust whenever they are worn, using a black cloth; keep them in a shoe bag, the buttons sewed on or ties fresh, and when growing shabby, brush the buttons and heels with black varnish and rub the shoes with a dressing, of which there are dozens nowadays, but do not use the dressing until needed, as when once commenced it must be continued. Patent leather shoes require a particular polish, which can be found at any shoe store.

JOHN BULL.—The word "Yankee" is older than the New English Colonies, "Yenghese" being the nearest approach the Indian tongue could make the word "English," and the word was applied to the northern English colonists by the Indians to distinguish them from the French on one side, and the Dutch on the other. The latter people soon adopted the term; and it was readily accepted by the New Englanders themselves. It was never considered a term of reproach, but rather one of honour, by the colonists.

T. A. T.—Smyrna is a city and seaport of Asia Minor, and the chief commercial emporium of West Asia. In spite of repeated earthquakes and visitations of the plague, it still maintains its importance as the centre of trade in the Levant. It is the see of Greek, Armenian, and Roman Catholic bishops. It is also the residence of the consuls of most of the principal European States. The houses of Smyrna are mostly of wood, and only one story in height, and the streets are narrow. It has Protestant churches.

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